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ABSTRACT

This document strives to answer questions about school choice, such as What does school choice mean?, What does school choice look like?, and What are the likely consequences of giving parents greater voice in their children's education? Reports are grouped into three thematic chapters. In chapter 1, "Public-Public Choice," reports include: "Family Choice Arrangements in Public Schools: A Review of the Literature" (Mary Anne Raywid); "Parent Involvement and Teacher Decision Making in Urban High Schools of Choice" (Patricia A. Bauch and Ellen B. Goldring); "Parent Involvement and School Choice: Exit and Voice in Public Schools" (Rodney T. Ogawa and Jo Sargent Dutton); and "SES and Demographic Predictors of Magnet School Enrollment" (Doug Archbald). Chapter 2, "Semi-Private Choice," contains the following reports: "Charter Schools: A Primer on the Issues" (Sandra Vergari); "Tracking the Charter School Movement" (Ann M. Schneider); "The State of Charter Schools 2000: Fourth-Year Report" (Beryl Nelson and others); "The Thinking behind Arizona's Charter Movement" (Gregg Garn); "Charter School Reform in California: Does It Meet Expectations?" (Amy Stuart Wells and others); "First Lessons: Charter Schools as Learning Communities" (Priscilla Wohlstetter and Noelle C. Griffin); "Charter Schools: Serving Disadvantaged Youth" (Bruno V. Manno, Gregg Vanourek, and Chester E. Finn, Jr.); "Charter Schools and the Law: Emerging Issues" (Charles J. Russo and Joseph D. Massucci); "For-Profit Charter Schools: What the Public Needs To Know" (Christy Lancaster Dykgraaf and Shirley Kane Lewis); and "For-Profit Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities: The Sordid Side of the Business of Schooling" (Nancy J. Zollers and Arun K. Ramanathan). Chapter 3, "Public-Private Choice," includes "Some Things You May Want To Know about Tuition Tax Credits" (Russell I. Thackrey); "Tuition Tax Credits and Education Vouchers: Private Interests and the Public Good" (Denis P. Doyle); "The Consequences of School Choice: Who Leaves and Who Stays in the Inner City" (Valerie J. Martinez and others); "Educational Vouchers: Effectiveness, Choice, and Costs" (Henry M. Levin); "The Milwaukee Voucher Experiment" (John F. Witte); and "Free Market Policies and Public Education: What Is the Cost of Choice?" (Kim K. Metcalf and Polly A. Tait). Each chapter begins with an

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overview of its school-choice issue. This document ends by discussing the fundamental issue of how much choice parents should be allowed to have in their children's education. (RT)

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SCHOOL CHOICE IN AMERICA: THE GREAT DEBATE

Kim K. Metcalf
Patricia A. Muller
Natalie A. Legan
Editors

June 2001

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Mary Anne Raywid. "Family Choice Arrangements in Public Schools: A Review of the Literature." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 55, no. 4, Winter 1985, pp. 435-467.

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Patricia A. Bauch and Ellen B. Goldring. "Parent Involvement and Teacher Decision Making in Urban High Schools of Choice." *Urban Education*, vol. 31, no. 4, November 1996, pp. 403-431.

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Rodney T. Ogawa and Jo Sargent Dutton. "Parent Involvement and School Choice: Exit and Voice in Public Schools." *Urban Education*, vol. 32, no. 3, September 1997, pp. 333-353.

97 **SES and Demographic Predictors of Magnet School Enrollment**

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Doug Archbald. "SES and Demographic Predictors of Magnet School Enrollment." *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, vol. 29, no. 3, Spring 1996, pp. 152-162.

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Sandra Vergari. "Charter Schools: A Primer on the Issues." *Education and Urban Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, August 1999, pp. 389-405.

131 **Tracking the Charter School Movement**

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Ann M. Schneider. "Tracking the Charter School Movement." *School Business Affairs*, vol. 64, no. 6, June 1998, pp.17-18, 20, 22-23.

137 **The State of Charter Schools 2000: Fourth-Year Report**

This executive summary from the fourth-year report of the National Study of Charter Schools provides descriptive information on charter schools based on three sources: 1) four waves of telephone surveys to all cooperating charter schools that were open between the 1995-96 and 1998-99 school years; 2) visits to 91 field sites across the country; 3) and extensive analysis of state charter laws. It presents major findings in the areas of growth trends, characteristics, students, and the founding of charter schools, challenges in implementing charter schools, and autonomy and accountability.

Beryl Nelson et al. "Executive Summary." *The State of Charter Schools 2000: Fourth-Year Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), 1-3.

141 **The Thinking Behind Arizona's Charter Movement**

Garn presents three underlying ideologies that motivate groups to support charter school reform — antibureaucracy, market-based education, and teacher professionalism — and examines how a specific state's policy reflects these ideologies. He notes that the charter school movement should not be viewed as a single entity given the various complex and sometimes competing ideologies motivating charter school legislation.

Gregg Garn. "The Thinking Behind Arizona's Charter Movement." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 56, no. 2, October 1998, pp. 48-50.

145 **Charter School Reform in California: Does It Meet Expectations?**

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Amy Stuart Wells et al. "Charter School Reform in California: Does It Meet Expectations?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 80, no. 4, December 1998, pp. 305-312.

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Priscilla Wohlstetter and Noelle C. Griffin. "First Lessons: Charter Schools as Learning Communities." *CPRE Policy Briefs*, RB-22-September 1997.

163 **Charter Schools: Serving Disadvantaged Youth**

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Bruno V. Manno, Gregg Vanourek, and Chester E. Finn Jr. "Charter Schools: Serving Disadvantaged Youth." *Education and Urban Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, August 1999, pp. 429-445.

181 **Charter Schools and the Law: Emerging Issues**

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Charles J. Russo and Joseph D. Massucci. "Charter Schools and the Law: Emerging Issues." *Education and Urban Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, August 1999, pp. 489-498.

191 **For-Profit Charter Schools: What the Public Needs to Know**

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Christy Lancaster Dykgraaf and Shirley Kane Lewis. "For-Profit Charter Schools: What the Public Needs to Know." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 56, no. 2, October 1998, pp. 51-53.

195 **For-Profit Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities: The Sordid Side of the Business of Schooling**

Zollers and Ramanathan studied the way that for-profit charter schools in Massachusetts handle special education. The authors argue that, in their efforts to make money and fulfill their promise to improve educational outcomes, for-profit charter schools in Massachusetts often ignore special education law and treat students with disabilities as financial liabilities.

Nancy J. Zollers and Arun K. Ramanathan. "For-Profit Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities: The Sordid Side of the Business of Schooling." *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 80, no. 4, December 1998, pp. 297-304.

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Russell I. Thackrey. "Some Things You May Want to Know About Tuition Tax Credits." *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 66, no. 1, September 1984, pp. 62-65.

211 **Tuition Tax Credits and Education Vouchers: Private Interests and the Public Good**

Doyle provides descriptive definitions of tuition tax credits and education vouchers as he supposes they would be implemented. The discussion includes perceived benefits that would accrue were such programs implemented nationally and focuses on important questions about the relationship between public and private good.

Denis P. Doyle. "Tuition Tax Credits and Education Vouchers: Private Interests and the Public Good." *College Board Review*, no. 130, Winter 1983-84, pp. 7-11.

217 **The Consequences of School Choice: Who Leaves and Who Stays in the Inner City**

The authors report their study of two choice programs in San Antonio, Texas. The first program, sponsored by the Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation, offered tuition vouchers to children whose parents chose to enroll them in area private schools. The second was offered by the San Antonio Independent School District and allowed families to choose to enroll their children in multi-lingual thematic programs in San Antonio public schools. The results indicate that parents who choose differ significantly from parents who do not in terms of education, income, marital status, and other factors.

Valerie J. Martinez et al. "The Consequences of School Choice: Who Leaves and Who Stays in the Inner City." *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 76, no. 3, September 1995, pp. 485-501.

235 **Educational Vouchers: Effectiveness, Choice, and Costs**

Levin reviews research that may inform on the issue of private school vouchers. Drawing primarily on studies comparing private and public schools on a variety of factors, he presents general findings and draws conclusions about how these findings are likely to apply to voucher programs. Across studies, he reports that there are few, if any, academic benefits of attending private school, that voucher programs are likely to promote increased racial and economic segregation, and that the cost of educating children in private schools is only slightly less than in public schools.

Henry M. Levin. "Educational Vouchers: Effectiveness, Choice, and Costs." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1998, pp. 373-392.

255 **The Milwaukee Voucher Experiment**

Witte reports on the first comprehensive study of publicly funded vouchers, using data collected from students, families, and schools in Milwaukee. Over a five-year period, he investigated a range of issues and questions associated with the effect of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program on children, schools, and the community. This report presents a description of the program and families that participated, the methodologies used to collect data, and detailed results of analyses. Witte suggests that the results were mixed.

John F. Witte. "The Milwaukee Voucher Experiment." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 20, no. 4, Winter 1998, pp. 229-251.

279 **Free Market Policies and Public Education: What Is the Cost of Choice?**

The authors attempt to answer several questions associated with publicly funded voucher programs. They rely heavily on their own experiences during their ongoing evaluation of the state-funded voucher program in Cleveland and provide an overview the findings after three years of study. They conclude that school choice, if not voucher programs, will continue to grow in coming years, but that research on the impact of such programs remains limited.

Kim K. Metcalf and Polly A. Tait. "Free Market Policies and Public Education: What Is the Cost of Choice?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 81, no. 1, September 1999, pp. 65-68, 70-75.

289 CONCLUSION

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

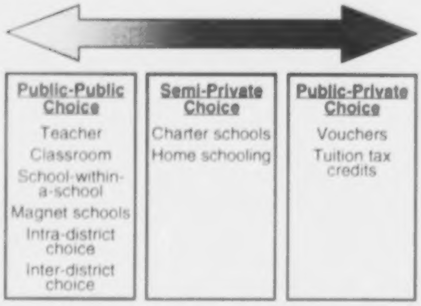
SCHOOL CHOICE has been called the "education issue of the new decade." The idea of providing parents or families with a greater range of educational options appears to be increasingly popular and widely accepted by those of all political and philosophical persuasions. Several recent polls suggest that as many as 80% of adults in the U.S. support the notion of expanded school or educational choices for families. Support is even stronger among urban and minority families.[1] In addition, a recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll suggests that 46% of public school parents would choose to send their child to a different school if they were given this option.[2] Of these, 7% would choose another public school, but 39% would choose a private school if state funds were available to support this option.

In spite of the rhetoric associated with school choice, or perhaps because of it, there is considerable confusion about the issue. What does "school choice" mean? What does it look like? Does it currently exist or is school choice only something that is talked about? What are the likely consequences of giving parents greater voice in their children's education, and how do we know? Each of these represents an important question in the debate. Our primary goal in this volume is to develop answers to these questions or, where answers are not available, to provide the reader with a range of perspectives.

Before describing the organization of the volume, it is useful to provide an overview of the school choice issue. As might be expected, "school choice" means different things to different people. However, it is generally agreed that school choice can be taken to mean *providing individual parents or families with some range of alternatives in their children's education from which they may make choices they believe are best suited to their children.* It is important to note that in this definition the alternatives can consist of a wide range of options. These options may include, but are not limited to, choice of the classroom or teacher with whom a student works, choice of special programs within a school, choice among public schools within or outside one's district of residence, and choice of schools, including private schools with or without religious affiliations. Thus, while some proposed choice programs are comparatively dramatic and challenge traditional beliefs about the nature and purposes of public schooling (e.g., those using public funds to support private school enrollment), others are commonly available and widely accepted (allowing choice of a child's teacher).

Some would argue that those with greater wealth have always had educational options because they could choose where they resided and, thus, where their children attended school. Or, again for those families with sufficient wealth, private school enrollment represented an alternative to public schooling. But for most families, particularly those of low income, the number of educational options has always been much smaller. Though many factors have prompted the current school choice movement, a belief that all families should have the educational options that have traditionally been available to the wealthy is undoubtedly among them.

Because school choice takes a variety of forms, we believe that it is useful to view the diverse options along a continuum, from those that represent limited choices within the existing public school parameters to those that allow choice outside the public school arena. The continuum is depicted below.



Public-Public Choice	Semi-Private Choice	Public-Private Choice
Teacher	Charter schools	Vouchers
Classroom	Home schooling	Tuition tax credits
School-within-a-school		
Magnet schools		
Intra-district choice		
Inter-district choice		

The figure reflects a range of choices from those that we call "public-public" at one end to those we call "public-private" at the other. Public-public choices are those that allow parents to select from options within the existing public school context, but even here the parameters can be more or less restrictive. Very limited choice might be made within a child's existing public school, such as selection of the child's teacher, classroom, or special program. Somewhat less restrictive, but still within the public sector, would be magnet schools or special program schools that could be chosen by families within the district as alternatives to their neighborhood or assigned school. Beyond this, but still within the public sector, would be programs that allowed parents to choose any school within their district of residence (intra-district choice or open enrollment) or, even less restrictive, programs that allow parents to choose public schools outside their district of residence (inter-district choice). More complete information about this end of our continuum is presented in chapter one, "Public-Public Choices."

The middle of our continuum, or "semi-private," refers to choice parameters that are neither clearly public nor clearly private. Included in this category would be home schooling, a choice that a number of individual families across the country have made, and the rapidly growing charter schools movement. Families who choose home schooling usually do so independently and, in most cases, are responsible for personally providing their children's education, though they may obtain assistance from a large network of for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. They are given broad latitude in the approaches and content they use, but must comply with minimal state requirements, often in the form of standardized achievement testing. Unlike home schooling, charter schools are legislatively created and authorized by the state, but can be established by either public or private entities. Like home schooling, these schools are exempted from many of the curricular and administrative requirements of fully public schools. However, in order to maintain their charter they must abide by the limited standards for performance established by the state. Because the number of children affected by charter schools is larger and continues to grow, we focus on literature associated with this movement in chapter two, "Semi-Private Choices."

At the other end of our continuum are what we refer to as "public-private" choice options. These options use public funds to support choices that can include private, even religious, schools. Tuition tax credits are an indirect method of payment by allowing parents to deduct a limited portion of their investment in private education from their income tax liability. Thus, parents pay for private education but are reimbursed for a portion of the expense through tax credits. Voucher programs are also a form of public-private choice, but more directly use public funds to support private education. As they have been implemented to date (in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Cleveland, Ohio, and in the state of Florida), these programs provide qualified families with vouchers that can be used to defray all or a portion of the tuition at the private school of their choice. While all public-private choice programs are controversial, the more direct allocation of public funds to support private education makes voucher programs the most controversial of the alternatives on our continuum. Chapter three, "Public-Private Choices," presents information related to these educational options.

The constitutionality of programs that support private school enrollment with public funds, particularly vouchers, remains unclear. Milwaukee's state-funded voucher program appears to be constitutionally acceptable after the state's supreme court ruled that the use of state education funds to support enrollment in religiously affiliated schools did not violate the state's constitution and the U.S. Supreme Court elected not to hear the subsequent appeal. The voucher program in Cleveland continues to operate while its constitutionality is debated in federal court. In an unusual ruling, the Ohio supreme court deemed the program to violate the state's constitution, *not* in regard to separation of church and state, but as a result of the manner in which it was legislatively approved. After the program was again approved by the Ohio legislature, a federal district judge ruled it to be in violation of the U.S. Constitution for failing to maintain separation of church and state and called for the program to be immediately discontinued. However, he revised his decision a few days later, allowing the program to continue to operate while the case was heard on appeal. Florida's voucher program has been found to violate the state's constitution on similar church-state grounds.

Recent Supreme Court rulings lead many to believe that when a voucher case is heard one of two outcomes is likely. Some assume that the Court will defer the issue to the states, as they did in the Milwaukee case. Such a ruling would be based on the Court's perception that education is a responsibility constitutionally given to the states and, as such, the state's constitution rather than the U.S. Constitution is applicable.

With this ruling, publicly-funded voucher programs might be constitutional in some states (Wisconsin and Ohio, for example), where the state's supreme court ruled them so, but unconstitutional in other states (like Florida). The second potential outcome is that the U.S. Supreme Court will, in fact, rule on the federal constitutionality of state-funded choice programs. The majority opinion written by Justice Thomas in a recent case seems to establish a precedent for allowing use of federal funds in private schools when: 1) the funds are *distributed to parents* who then *choose* to use them in private, even religiously affiliated schools; and 2) where the funds themselves are not provided by the state or government in ways that *promote* or *hinder* any particular religion or ideology. However, and even in light of such a ruling, the constitutionality of any specific voucher program is not certain and may never be.

The issue of school choice is broad, complex, and often controversial. Opinions are diverse, arguments are vehement, and valid research on the issue is surprisingly limited. It would be impossible to cover all aspects of the topic thoroughly given the parameters of the present work. However, we have attempted to provide a balanced overview of the topic using what we believe to be reasonable and representative sources. We have included papers from those who support and those who oppose school choice, those who merely describe choice options and those who have attempted to study them objectively. Our goal is to provide information and resources that help the reader become more informed on the issue of school choice and, if desired, to obtain additional information and insight.

Kim K. Metcalf
Patricia A. Muller
Natalie A. Legan
Editors

KIM K. METCALF is associate professor of curriculum and instruction and director of the Indiana Center for Evaluation at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, where PATRICIA A. MULLER is senior research associate and NATALIE A. LEGAN is a graduate research assistant.

Endnotes:

1. See Lisa Carlos, *The Privatization of Choice*, (San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Policy Update No. 3, 1993); and L. Joseph Matthews and J. Merrell Hansen, "Choice Within Schools Can Help Students, Schools, and Society," *NASSP Bulletin*, September 1995, pp. 69-76
2. Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 31st Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1999, p. 46.

PUBLIC-PUBLIC CHOICE

OVERVIEW

THE MATERIAL in this chapter focuses on public-public choices. By that, we mean educational options that are proscribed to include a range of alternatives within the public school sector. These can be choices associated with teachers, optional or alternative programs within the child's school, or participation in various curricular and extra-curricular activities. More fundamentally, they may include the option of choosing the public school in which a family enrolls their child, either within or outside the school district of residence. Intra-district choice refers to programs that allow families to choose their child's school from those within their district of residence regardless of the neighborhood in which they live. Inter-district choice is used to describe programs that allow families to choose public schools outside the district in which they live.

Public-public alternatives generally include choices from among common options (i.e., from among regular public schools) and, as a result, they are much less controversial than choice options at the opposite end of the continuum. Nonetheless, they represent a wide but often unrecognized range of educational choices, many of which are available to parents and families today. Most parents realize the importance that a child's teacher can make or the effect that other students in a class can have on their child. When offered the opportunity to voice preferences for a child's teacher or the classroom to which he or she is assigned, most parents would gladly accept. Further, within-school options, such as participation in extra-curricular activities or clubs and special academic or curricular programs, are available to virtually every public school family.

Somewhat more dramatic and less frequently available are options for parents or families to choose the school their child attends, like intra- or inter-district choice programs and magnet schools. These alternatives are likely to be less familiar to many readers and, as a result, we have chosen articles that focus on them for this chapter.

In the first article, Raywid offers a comprehensive and informative overview of public-public choice options. Her descriptions and reviews of research begin with options that reflect very limited choice (selection of a teacher, classroom, or program within a school). She then moves her discussion to less restrictive inter- and intra-district choice programs, including magnet schools. This article provides definitions and the conceptual underpinnings of the range of public-public choice options. Rather than attempting to improve or expand upon Raywid's work, we rely on her article to introduce the reader to the concepts presented throughout this chapter.

The second and third articles of this chapter report on research about the relationship between the types of schools or educational options available to parents and the choices they make. Bauch and Goldring present results of a survey of parents and teachers from inner-city high schools. The focus of the study was on the relationship between teacher decision making in the schools and the level of parental empowerment. The most collaborative partnership between parents and teachers was found in Catholic schools, with parents having substantial power in multi-focus magnet schools and almost no power in single-focus public schools. Similarly, Ogawa and Dutton report that parental perceptions of their children's schools are substantially related to the types of choice they exercise. Those who feel they have a voice in their child's school are more likely to elect for intra-district choice; those who are less satisfied but still feel they have a voice are most likely to opt to use vouchers for public school enrollment; and those who are simply less satisfied are likely to choose inter-district options.

The remaining article in the chapter focuses on magnet school programs and, more specifically, on factors that influence parents to apply to these programs for their children. Archbald reports on an examination of if and how race, class, and geographic factors influence the schools parents choose. At the heart of these studies is the issue of how choice affects not only children and families, but also schools and communities.

It is apparent that public schools currently offer a range of educational alternatives and that the number and scope of choices is increasing. Further, it is interesting that research suggests some factors that appear to be related to the ways in which parents demand or exercise educational choice. However, it is also clear from these articles that much remains to be learned about how and why parents make their decisions and the implications for developing choice programs.

Review of Educational Research
Winter, 1985, Vol. 55, No. 4, Pp. 435–467

Family Choice Arrangements in Public Schools: A Review of the Literature

Mary Anne Raywid
Hofstra University

From Mary Anne Raywid, "Family Choice Arrangements in Public Schools: A Review of the Literature," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 55, no. 4, Winter 1985, pp. 435-467. ©1985 by American Educational Research Association. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

ABSTRACT. This paper reviews the history of family choice opportunities in public schools. It looks first at the development of tracking, of individual alternative schools, and of options systems. Then, after exploring the possible targets of choice (curriculum, instructional periods, teachers, schools), it offers detailed examinations of the several choice models that have proved widespread: open enrollment plans, magnet schools, schools within schools, satellites and separate alternatives, and inter-district choice plans.

Choice schemes have proliferated in public education over the past dozen years. Major contributing factors include the following:

- the perception that parents have very little to say about the education of their children;
- the fact that over the years, control of schools has moved increasingly in the direction of central district offices, states, the federal government, and "ancillary structures" (Wayland, 1964), such as textbook publishers, testing services, and accreditation agencies;
- the sense of impotence and ensuing alienation experienced by many parents in trying to deal with local schools;
- the growing evidence of systematic failure of the school to deal effectively with some student populations;
- the growing evidence of the disaffection and psychic estrangement from schools of those who work in them—teachers as well as students;
- the explication and spread of the notion that there is no one best system of education for all youngsters;
- the growing public resentment of service agencies and the ensuing critique of the service professions; and
- the intensification of particular social problems, including segregation, school violence and vandalism, the decline of the cities, and youth unemployment.

These situations gave rise to a variety of efforts to empower parents vis-à-vis schools. The initial plans featured proposals such as decentralization and advisory councils, which largely failed so far as parent empowerment is concerned (Clasby, 1977; Gittell et al., 1973; Steinberg, 1979). The essential strategy of such plans was

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to increase the representational base of parents so that more of them—and more *groups* of them—had opportunity to participate in school deliberations (Raywid, 1980). It became increasingly evident, however, that what parents sought was not just *input* into decisions but *influence*—two quite different things (Firestone, 1977). The choice idea grew gradually as an answer. The opportunity to "vote with one's feet" represents instant empowerment, bestowing the opportunity to reject a whole school and move to another, if things get bad enough. Choice emerged, moreover, as a possible solution to other problems—most notably to the need to desegregate schools.

This paper will briefly trace the history of the choice idea as it grew, and then examine some contemporary family choice models in detail. Before doing so, it might be relevant, however, to review the major choice mechanism in public schools prior to recent efforts to expand the options. This seems worth doing not only by way of backdrop, but also because there have been some who have persistently maintained that public schools have provided choice right along. The major means of doing so has been the provision of separate *tracks* for student selection.

Tracking

Tracking has been the significant choice mechanism in the comprehensive high school, although there—and in elementary schools—a tracking system can operate without choice. As of 1967, tracking was held to discriminate unconstitutionally on both racial and economic grounds, at least as practiced in Washington, D.C. (Hobson v. Hansen). The practice has been subject to challenge on both due process and equal protection grounds (Oakes, 1983). Yet it appears that many public schools continue tracking practices in various forms and to varying degrees. The idea underlying tracking at the secondary level has been to provide opportunity for students to enter school programs according to their post high school plans, aspirations, and probable futures. Those intending to go on to college can choose the academic or college preparatory program; those planning to enter the work world immediately can, in a comprehensive high school, choose between a business-commercial program and a vocational program emphasizing manual skills. And a general program is often maintained for those not college-bound but not disposed either toward the other alternatives. (One detailed study suggests that the general track, in contrast to the other three, is not the first choice of anyone. Most students enter it by default, i.e., by virtue of poor performance in another track [Rosenbaum, 1976].)

The negatives associated with these curricular options emerge from the fact that they not only divide students by interests and future plans but also by ability, race, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, not only does tracking produce immediate status differentials among students, but since content differs in different tracks, it tends permanently to freeze or limit youngsters to the tracks they have chosen. More precisely, they can always move (or be moved) downward, into a lower track; it is upward movement into a higher or more prestigious sequence that the tracking system prevents (Hobson v. Hansen, 1967; Oakes, 1983; Rosenbaum, 1976).

According to some empirical evidence, the ability separations tend to increase differentials, and the less fortunate youngsters (minority, poor, low ability) are the losers in all respects: They get the weaker teachers, less is expected of them, they participate less in school programs and activities, they fall farther behind their agemates, and they are slotted for the lower status, less rewarded jobs in society (Gittell, 1973). In Washington, D.C., the arrangement discontinued by Judge Skelly Wright's landmark decision put high school students into four tracks: honors, regular college prep, general, or basic. Although advocates spoke of choice, and different curricular patterns marked each of the four tracks, each also represented a particular ability level (Hansen, 1968). Education in the lower tracks, said Judge Wright, "is geared to the 'blue-collar' student. Thus such children, . . . stigmatized by inappropriate aptitude testing procedures, are denied equal opportunity to obtain the white collar education available to the white and more affluent children" (Filson, 1967, p. H7698).

It has been pointed out that the presentation of options based on prospective educational and career choices serves to pit national values against one another: It pits the values of choice and self-determination against the value of equal opportunity; it pits choice and equal opportunity against the efficiency of the school as an early identifier and preparer of students for their prospective social roles. This value conflict is by no means evident to all the actors. In fact, there is evidence that school administrators are themselves unclear about a tracking system's conflating of curricular choice with ability grouping. Studies of tracking arrangements find principals to be confused or deceptive about the nature, extent, and effects of tracking in their own schools. For instance, one junior high, which denied tracking both by official policy and on the principal's report, was found to be operating nine separate tracks! Although students and their parents were not informed about it, the choice of a foreign language in the seventh grade served to place the student in one of five college-bound tracks; rejection of the language option slotted the student for one of four non-college bound tracks. Placement in each of the two broad categories created by the language choice was accomplished by assignment to ability-based levels by guidance counselors (Rosenbaum, 1976).

Certainly the confusion and the deception should be eliminated, and full, accurate information given; but is tracking necessarily an evil? For some the answer is no: Students and their families should be free to select their own education, and if tastes or limitations circumscribe their choices, that is the cost of freedom. For others, the answer is yes: Tracking is inherently wrong, and the only way a system of educational choice can be rendered right and proper is to (a) separate the choices from specific job preparation, (b) divorce them from ability grouping, and (c) make sure that they are not systematically generative of statuses and stigma. Such criteria limit the kinds of choices that can legitimately be offered, and defenders of the comprehensive high school have tended to avoid the question of how they might be met (see, e.g., Tanner, 1979). However, a number of specialty, alternative, and magnet schools have managed to operate within such limits while still responding to student needs and to their academic and career interests. (See footnote 2 for one way they have sought to do so.)

Alternatives

The alternatives movement in the public schools began in the late 1960s. Parkway opened in Philadelphia in 1969; Wilson Open Campus School in Mankato, Minnesota, in 1968; and Murray Road in Newton, Massachusetts, in 1967. Public "alternative" schools were often influenced by private schools launched earlier in

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the sixties outside "the system" (Graubard, 1974; Nathan, 1976). They tended to be started for one or more of the following reasons:

(1) to provide a more personalized and humanistic setting for young people;
(2) to provide a broader, more exciting, challenging, and satisfying education for young people;
(3) to provide a more meaningful link between childhood and adulthood, better acquainting young people with the world they are entering and better equipping them to deal with it;
(4) to provide a more accurate picture of the world—especially of its problems and injustices—and more effective ways of dealing with it;
(5) to open up genuine educational opportunities for youngsters with whom conventional public schooling seemed systematically unsuccessful (e.g., inner city poor, ghetto minorities).

The programs growing out of these several purposes differed, of course, in consequence of the goals prompting them. The first three purposes often led to largely white, upper middle class, suburban alternatives; the fourth and fifth motives typically underlay urban, inner city programs. But both types were known as "alternative" schools and both sought from the start to respond to particular student needs and interests allegedly unmet in regular schools and to particular parent concerns and desires which other schools failed to satisfy (Fantini, 1973).

Both types tended also to share another feature: They were not born of a commitment to educational diversity and choice. Rather, the people involved with them tended to see their programs as vanguard operations pointing the way to reforms *all* schools should embrace. The "different strokes for different folks" idea—and the explicit challenge to the "one best system" arrangement undergirding American education—were products of the early seventies and did not obtain much circulation until several years after the first alternatives had become part of public school systems.

From the start, the alternatives took many forms and were institutionalized in diverse ways. The school-without-walls pioneered by Parkway became a favorite early model, and as of 1973, 22% of public school alternatives were of this type. Open schools, learning centers, and continuation centers each accounted for another 20% of the programs identified as of that time (National Consortium for Options in Public Education, 1973). The learning centers concentrated special, unusual, or expensive resources in a common location, and the continuation centers brought alternative approaches to programs targeted for dropouts, pregnant teenagers, and other groups in need of special treatment. The school-without-walls arrangement involved students pursuing learning in the community rather than in classrooms. Their instruction consisted of observing and participating in business and industry and in various municipal and professional offices.

Other alternatives pursued quite different instructional practices in very different settings, including storefronts, halls, and parsonages, as well as parts of schools. They featured such new ideas as independent study, experiential and service learning, and older concepts such as schools themselves being communities and democracies. What was common to these early alternatives was, first, a tendency to emerge as a grass-roots or home-grown phenomenon initiated and designed by those who would work within them, and, second, a tendency to define themselves in terms of their departures from, and contrasts with, traditional schools (Wolf, Walker, & Mackin, 1974). From the start, then, alternative school people tended to be keenly aware of and explicitly desirous of creating these differences. Some of them experienced stunning successes in motivating the previously apathetic to learn and in turning around the lives of young people whose futures had appeared dim. With the ebullience and confidence of the sixties, many hoped that such benefits could be widely obtained in other programs once the pathway had been pointed out.

Options Systems

The schools composing the first contemporary public choice *systems* had quite a different genesis, despite some similarities of individual programs to the earlier alternative schools. They were inspired by the U.S. Office of Education's Experimental Schools Program launched in 1971. The experience of two of the program's first three recipients is of special interest. Federal motives, purposes, and evaluation criteria made one of the two a success and the other a failure.

Minneapolis was the success story. There, a diversification effort in one area of the city functioned eventually to put all Minneapolis elementary schools on an options basis. Four programs were created in the pilot area: a contemporary school, a continuous progress school, an open school, and a free school. The city's aims in the venture included (a) providing family choice, (b) decentralizing school governance, (c) increasing parent participation, (d) improving educational quality, and (e) desegregating schools. All five aims seemed to have been met by the options arrangement with enough success that after 2 years the School Board voted unanimously to extend it to all elementary schools. (It was later decided to extend the options plan also to the secondary level, but that decision was never carried out [French, 1975].)

Descriptions of Minneapolis's Southeast Alternatives project make clear that a rather unique planning and implementation process occurred. The alternative schools were designed with extensive staff and parent participation. Indeed, even the group that designed the initial proposal to the Office of Education held weekly Saturday meetings to which all parents were invited by flyers which went home on Friday outlining the discussion agenda for the following day. And choice was an explicit aim not only for students and parents, but for teachers as well. The combining of choice and decentralization proved particularly propitious. As the situation was described by Superintendent John B. Davis,

> The participatory process . . . evolved in the SEA schools has reshaped the profession and returned a degree of authority to those who perform teaching roles. Functions of planning, decisionmaking, responsibility and accountability have been restored to the faculty, and in some cases roles of teachers and principals have been altered significantly. . . . What has evolved is a new collegial model. (French, 1975, p. 118)

Berkeley, the other key recipient of funds from the Experimental Schools Program, was a somewhat different case. By the time the Experimental Schools Program began in 1971, Berkeley already had nine alternative schools, begun with the aid of at least two foundation grants (Kohn, 1973). The 5-year commitment, and the $6 million promised under the federal grant, permitted extending the total to 23 alternatives and enrolling 30% of the city's students in alternative programs. But some have questioned the extent of the commitment of Berkeley school officials from the start, and the project foundered on misunderstandings between Berkeley school people and the federal government's two controlling agencies (first the Office of Education, then the newly created National Institute of Education). The government's interest was in researching methods for changing entire districts. Berkeley's interests, it seemed, included solving racial problems and otherwise humanizing the programs enrolling youngsters from families concerned about such matters. Federal intervention—on the part of grant monitors and federal courts—interfered with Berkeley's alternatives, closed two of them, and yielded continuing frustrations. Some claim that amidst the prevailing conditions, it is not surprising that there was little impact of the alternatives on the system; that during the grant period, the alternatives seemed to revert more and more to conventional practice; and that most of the alternatives closed even before the grant period ended. The federally contracted external evaluator submitted a report highly critical of the way the project and its evaluation had been coerced by Washington, and suggested that the entire venture might well be characterized "a $6 million misunderstanding" (Institute for Scientific Analysis, 1976).

Meanwhile, the Experimental Schools Program, which funded Berkeley and Minneapolis's pilot projects, was not the only federal program helping to generate alternatives systems. The Office of Economic Opportunity was eager to test the voucher concept and in 1972 awarded funds to the Alum Rock district in San Jose, California, for that purpose. The agreement so modified voucher presuppositions, however, that it created an alternatives system within the public schools instead (Weiler, 1974). (The most important departures from the voucher idea included the absence of private school participants, of restrictions on financial incentives to popular schools, and of teacher risk at unpopular ones.) During the 5-year grant period, there were as many as 50 minischools or alternative programs in the district's 25 elementary schools. In the interests of making diverse programs accessible in all areas, they offered 10 different types, emphasizing basic skills, fine arts, creative arts, multicultural learning, bilingual and bicultural learning, careers, open education, individualized instruction, and learning by doing. One or another of these 10 different types or models was implemented at each of the 50 sites.

Creation of the minischools was a condition of receiving the grant, of course, since diversification, or real alternatives, are important to meaningful choice. This meant that even though individual teachers and schools made their own decisions on whether to participate, there were sometimes pressures to do so. There were also incentives, which included additional resources (coming largely from the compensatory sums accompanying poor children) and increased professional autonomy in the design and management of one's program.

Few have called the Alum Rock experiment a success. In the first place, it failed to generate truly diverse alternatives, and observers found only limited departures from traditional practice (Rand, 1981). Parents—especially the most alienated—appreciated the choice opportunity but were disappointed when the programs did not live up to their expectations. Many parents failed to exercise the choice option and did so only to choose the neighborhood school (Bridge & Blackman, 1978). There were no consistent, appreciable differences in student outcomes (Capell, 1981). Teachers, although pleased at their increased control over their own classrooms and at the extra resources, reported workload increases and tensions with colleagues in other minischools in the building (Rasmussen, 1981).

The Rand volume summarizing the evaluation of the Alum Rock experiment is very careful, however, in stating what can be concluded from the project (Rand, 1981). Of course, the departures from the voucher concept agreed upon from the start mean that virtually nothing can be concluded relative to the feasibility or operation of a voucher system (Wortman & St. Pierre, 1977). But with respect to public alternatives systems, can it validly be inferred from the Alum Rock report that they are doomed to very limited and partial success, or is it that such systems launched under certain conditions and implemented in particular ways are unlikely to prove successful? The following factors have been advanced as crucial limitations on the success potential of the Alum Rock alternatives:

1. There was never local interest in options or diversification on the part of the community or school authorities.
2. There was no evidence of dissatisfaction within the district prior to the experiment, and in fact parents had been pleased with the schools.
3. District officials' interest in the project was limited to the solution of financial problems, the desire to decentralize school governance, and a general concern with increased parental participation.
4. The timing of the award left very little time for designing the initial alternatives, and time was not subsequently made available for doing so.
5. There was no district-level support in the planning of programs or in the provision of staff development activities for designing or implementing them.

Thus, the first three major attempts at options systems, as distinct from individual alternatives, yielded mixed success. The Minneapolis effort was the most promising of the three, while the other two appeared problematic, although for different reasons. We shall see some of what now appears relevant to outcomes of family choice arrangements as we look at the several models that have emerged. It has been the purpose of these brief synopses just to present some highlights of the early history of alternatives systems.

Choice Plans and Possibilities

As we begin exploring the various models of family choice that have operated in recent decades, it may be useful to consider the range of logical possibilities regarding choice. Formal education has a number of components, and it is possible in principle for families to have some choices with respect to some or all of these. There is always a curriculum with detailed content, and this is presented through particular instructional methods and activities, by teachers, and in schools. Here, then, are four possible areas of choice: curriculum and content, methods, teachers, and schools. A brief look at each will substantiate the absence of choice in schooling decisions, and the somewhat narrow practicable possibilities for instituting it.

Curriculum and Content

The idea of curricular choice is certainly a familiar one. Ever since Harvard's famed President Charles Eliot presented his electives proposal at the turn of the century, the notion of choice of courses has been familiar in American education.

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Eliot's proposal, although criticized as yielding a "cafeteria" system, gained acceptance (and decades later was upgraded with the call for schools to become great "smorgasbords" of learning) (Holt, 1970).

A number of today's critics are charging that that is exactly what has happened. Exposés reporting that a high school offers 111 different course choices—or 300 or 87—have become familiar over the past few years. What is rarely reported, however, is who can choose them, and to what extent. It could be that despite Holt's smorgasbord recommendation and the current exposé articles, in most American schools there have been relatively few curricular options for students and their families (Rosenbaum, 1976). In my own suburban, New York school district, for example, elementary school yields no choices. Junior high, as of 5 years ago, proffered exactly two over the 3-year period: whether and which foreign language, and typing or no typing. And high school didn't offer a great many more, once postgraduation aspirations were declared.

Comprehensive high schools typically offer the four tracks identified in the previous section. But this system is not synonymous with choice. In the first place, there are serious questions as to the extent to which students choose or are assigned or "guided" into the various tracks. Moreover, once entered, the track may permit few electives. Yet these tracks have constituted the major means by which schools recognize and respond to the differences in youngsters and their interests and plans. As the system operates, the track metaphor may well be a lot more apt than widely supposed. Once embarked, there may remain few choices—with digressions tantamount to derailments (Rosenbaum, 1976).

John Goodlad's recent study, for example, reported considerable similarity in the social studies curricula of junior highs. At the high school level, American history and government constitute the "basics." Goodlad found a range of electives beyond these basics, but an interest in choice makes it important to ask not only how many options there are to choose among, but how many choices one gets. If the situation permits only 1 social studies elective, it may well prove misleading to hear that the school offers 20 such electives. Unfortunately, none of the school studies appearing to date seems to have addressed this question, so it remains a question whether the number of choices has commonly been as extensive as current criticisms would suggest.

A study of several years ago found that the pressing question in curriculum-making was not what will be taught, but who would decide that (Schaffarzick & Curriculum Development Task Force, 1976). Certainly this would suggest high interest in choice.

Construing content as the substance fitting into and comprising the different curricula—the specific subject matter within each course—the schools have been even less willing to permit content than curricular choices. Although some choice among specified options is not uncommon in some courses (e.g., determining book reports for English class) such opportunities constitute a relatively small portion of the work. And family attempts at content determination are extremely difficult to accommodate in a regular school arrangement. Typical classroom settings and management procedures are such that protests most typically have to result in no more than holding a youngster out of class while offending fare is under consideration. The only alternative would be permitting some families to impose their preferences on an entire class.

Present classroom arrangements and decision structures make it likely that most family attempts to influence content decisions will elicit charges of censorship and evoke defenses of academic freedom (Strike, 1977). The dramatic incidents of Kanawha County, West Virginia, a decade ago consisted of just such a struggle. One group of parents objected strenuously to content and materials used in English classes, calling them "anti-God, anti-family, and anti-America" (Schulman, 1975). In the absence of school choice arrangements, they could press their case only by seeking control over the content and material to be presented to all youngsters. It is undoubtedly the difficulty of resolving such situations satisfactorily that has led the courts to severely limit the rights of parents to prevail. Mere matters of taste and preference do not suffice, and in general, courts have upheld parent protests against content and materials only when (a) their criticisms have reached "constitutional proportions" and (b) when no greater state interest justifies overriding their constitutional rights (Hirschoff, 1977; Schulman, 1975). It remains to be seen whether, and to what extent, Hatch Amendment regulations may eventually modify these precedents.

Attempts to envision what school keeping would be like under circumstances where individual families chose content and materials are likely to appear as nightmares to most professional educators. Of all the places and ways in which family choice might figure, this is perhaps the most difficult to envisage as satisfactory. Yet the problems making it so attach largely to traditional classroom management arrangements and appear more tractable under different arrangements.

For example, there is currently at least one plan for direct individual family participation in the selection of content and materials (Esbensen & Richards, 1976). It is reported to have operated successfully in the public schools of Edina, Minnesota, and perhaps elsewhere. It combines an individualized instruction plan, performance-based goals, and mutual negotiation among a student, a teacher, and a parent to arrive at the learning contracts the student will fulfill. The arrangement calls for a minimum of four annual conferences among the three parties to design plans for the student. It has operated K-12 and at the high school level the amount of time spent in the program is itself a matter of choice: A student can register for anything from a single unit to a full program of independent study. Although subject to negotiation—for example, in the interests of meeting state graduation requirements—students and their families under this plan gain considerable power in decisions of content and materials to be pursued.

Instructional Methods and Activities

If family choice is limited with respect to curriculum and content then how about with respect to the methods whereby the learning will occur? Do instructional methods and activities yield greater choice? As one might guess, aside from extremely limited classroom project choices (e.g., do a written book report or do an oral presentation), methodological choices appear rare. The bringing about of learning is, after all, the teacher's principal stock in trade. The educator's claim to professional knowledge and expertise is usually thought to reside in the ability to make and execute informed decisions on such matters. Thus, it might predictably be rare for this professional responsibility to be assigned to families. Perhaps the only major choice opportunities in this regard are somewhat indirect. In those alternatives or magnets that feature a pedagogical approach (e.g., open or traditionalist programs), instructional methods are a prominent part of what is chosen. The same is true of particular types of programs, such as schools without walls and internships. The opportunity each extends is for a different approach to learning than usual classroom instruction comprises.

Still another context in which learners, if not their families, may be said to have indirect choice opportunities related to instructional methods is that provided by attempts to match teaching styles to learning styles. At least some such plans stem from student responses on instruments asking which of several presented sorts of learning arrangements they prefer. Attempts to tailor instruction to the modes most compatible for the learner[1] might be said to introduce a type of choice.

But these several arrangements yielding a degree of choice with respect to instructional methods and activities tend to be indirect, that is, the methods are components of a larger package available for selection, as is the case with the school within a school or the internship option. In few, if any, instances are families offered opportunities to decide whether memorization and drill or problem-solving shall dominate a youngster's pursuit of learning. By and large, pedagogical methods are probably the least likely components of the school program to yield direct family choice opportunities. As noted, the selection of pedagogical methods is simply too central to what both educators and noneducators see as the teacher's professional province.

Teachers

What, then, with respect to choosing teachers? Presumably they could be an object of family choice, and this is a point at which families may in fact often attempt to influence decisions. Open pick-a-teacher arrangements are extremely rare, however. Three sorts of considerations tend to militate against them. The first is professional claims, which operate in several ways to oppose choice: They suggest that the decision as to who might work most effectively with a given child is first and foremost a technical question demanding the special knowledge of educators. Professionalism also contributes to a broad assumption of the equivalence of teachers due to their similar education and training: Since all have been exposed to the same knowledge and the same clinical training, they are essentially equal in that which is relevant to their professional performance. Hence, family choice is unnecessary.

The interests of administrative convenience provide a second major obstacle to family selection of teachers. It is far easier and less troublesome in personal terms to let a school employee—or, more recently, the computer—do it. This way, different classes can be equalized in size, tracked as to ability levels if that seems indicated, or adjusted in composition on any other criterion as administrators see fit. And to make this procedure routine in some simple way, such as random assignment by computer, is far less demanding of time and emotional energy than to help families make their decisions and respond to their preferences and prejudices.

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[1] It should be noted that this distorts the matching idea a bit, since most versions recommend introducing *content* via the student's stronger or preferred modes, but otherwise having learners pursue modes *not* preferred, in the interests of developing them (see e.g., Dunn, 1983).

Teachers themselves have often opposed pick-a-teacher arrangements. Certainly to have others' classes fill up while one's own remained underenrolled would be a professional embarrassment. But the price could be even steeper than humiliation, as several recent plans have made quite plain. Harvey Scribner, former chancellor of New York City's schools and now a professor at the University of Massachusetts, is a strong advocate of choice in education. He wants families to be able to choose the schools their youngsters will attend, the programs in which they will be enrolled, and the specific teachers with whom they will learn. In making his case, Dr. Scribner (1984) emphasizes how such an arrangement will drive poor teachers from classrooms since they will not be able to attract a clientele. Another plan enabling family choice of teachers might conceivably yield similar effects, but it is presented somewhat differently: A Minnesota superintendent is eager to try an arrangement he calls an "Entrepreneurial Teacher School System" (Lieber, 1983). Teacher salaries and classroom budgets would be based on their enrollments. A teacher with a sufficiently attractive program might then be in a position to hire assistants, as well as to obtain additional materials. To my knowledge, neither the Scribner nor the Lieber plan has yet been implemented—and indeed, Alum Rock teachers insisted on protections from just the sorts of possibilities that these two proposals envision (Weiler, 1974). The threats they raise, when juxtaposed with the power of teacher organizations, suggest that the likelihood of such arrangements is remote. Indeed, the Scribner proposal seems to highlight as positives what are precisely the negatives for powerful stakeholders and thus to epitomize the difficulties such a plan would encounter.

Schools

It would appear, then, that the current extent of and prospects for family choice are limited with respect to the selection of curriculum and content, instructional methods, and teachers. Logical, ideological, political, and professional considerations all serve to restrict the number and desirability of such choice models. There remains, however, the possibility of family choice of a school or of a distinct, separate unit within a school. Such an arrangement seems to offer considerable advantage over the other three. First, it provides a practicable means of extending curricular and content choice well beyond what usual practice permits. It may also constitute a methodological option as well. Second, the possibility of choosing among several types of schools enables more families to maximize their preferences, and at the least cost to others who do not share them—major advantages in a democratic society. Third, deliberately diversified schools (or units within schools) also provide a feasible mechanism for combining the values of family choice and professionalism: The options available consist of programs professionally designed and operated. But as a group, they represent different kinds of educations, facilitating the selection of the program that best accords with family preferences. This way, even in the absence of direct choice opportunities as to each program component (curriculum, content, instructional methods, teachers), there are options for overall program selection. Finally, and of enormous importance, it seems increasingly clear that only diversification among schools (or units) can provide a choice of school climate, which may ultimately be the single most important selection criterion for both students and their parents (Erickson, 1982; Goodlad, 1983b; Grant, 1981; Raywid, 1983).

Since the choice arrangement has proved much more workable with respect to schools than with respect to one or another of the components of schools, it is not surprising that many more models of this type have emerged. We now have numerous types falling within three genres known variously as alternatives, magnets, and specialty schools. Before exploring them, a warning about usages: There are serious nomenclature difficulties in discussing alternative schools, magnets, and specialty schools. Some people use the term *alternatives* generically, as synonymous with schools of choice. For others, however, the word alternatives refers only to particular types of schools. For many, it is schools for problem youngsters, and thus they find it an affront to magnet and specialty schools to view them as subsets of alternatives. For them, alternatives are just one subset of magnets. The alternatives label seems to carry a variety of denotations—and negative connotations for many. New York City has only 10 programs formally classified as alternatives. They are all targeted for at-risk students. Yet, other people in the area tend to associate the term instead with the most radical free schools of the sixties and seventies, leaving them, too, less than positive about the objects of their caricatures. Some parts of the country have still another usage, whereby alternatives are not schools of choice at all, but punitive arrangements, such as in-school suspension programs.

An ensuing complication is that the same sorts of programs go by different labels in different communities. For example, Manhattan's District 4 schools are known as "alternative concept" schools, but appear to be what a recent study has defined as magnets (Blank, Dentler, Baltzell, & Chabotar, 1983). And Milwaukee calls its magnets "specialty schools."

The upshot is that one has to proceed with some caution before deciding that family choice schools in one district are similar to those identically named in another, and the conclusion that programs differently named in adjoining communities are in fact different requires similar care. Perhaps just one apparent distinction marking the two kinds of schools of choice most often named may prove helpful from the start: Alternative schools are usually (but not always) "localized" or single-program efforts within a district, designed to respond to a single challenge or problem or target group. They are not likely to beget other alternatives within the district. Magnet schools, in contrast, usually represent a district commitment to at least some degree of diversification, and so one rarely finds a district with just one magnet. If there is one, there are likely to be more. Beyond this single tendency, however, there seem few constants in the usage of these terms.

The entries among the broad types of schools of choice are sufficiently numerous and varied that an attempt at logical ordering may help. A logically adequate typology with parallel entries and mutually exclusive categories is not yet possible. Nevertheless, some groupings may lend clarity to the discussion to follow.

Structurally, schools of choice take one of the following forms, which may be intradistrict or interdistrict: open enrollment schools, magnets, alternatives, public vouchers, or specialty schools. Individually, they are one of the following: school within a school, minischool, entire school, or satellite or "outpost."

Programmatically, magnets, alternatives, public vouchers, and specialty schools often take one of two forms: the dominant feature organizing and articulating them is their curriculum, *or* it is their instructional methods and activities.

Curriculum-dominated programs include magnet schools (especially at the high school level) and specialty schools (especially at the high school level). Sample curricular programs include the following: multicultural, just community, language academies, health services, and performing arts.

Programs defined more by their instructional activities than by their content include magnets (especially at the elementary level), specialty schools (especially at the elementary level), and alternatives. Samples of individual programs so organized include the following: schools without walls, Montessori schools, Walkabout or Challenge programs, open schools, free schools, and fundamental or traditionalist schools.

With respect to *target populations*, magnets, vouchers, specialty, and alternative schools also differ. Some are designed to draw a representative cross section of the district's students with respect to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic origins; ability and achievement levels; and school motivation. Others are designed to respond primarily to one or another student type: bored and "turned off" students, the unchallenged, the gifted and talented, underachievers, low achievers, dropout-prone, dropouts, disruptive, or students in trouble with the law.

The foregoing groupings present 36 categories and subcategories of family choice models. Although some simply appear to be different names for the same thing (e.g., magnets and specialty schools), other listings (e.g., the programmatically oriented schools) are only illustrative and far from complete. Thus, only some types of schools have been selected for detailed examination in this paper. They constitute a logically ragged set, but were selected with several things in mind. One criterion used was the total numbers of a given type currently operating nationwide. A second consideration was information available, since research on schools of choice is scant and skewed as to type. Except where a federal initiative has mandated studies (as in the case of magnet schools, programs for youngsters at risk, and Experimental Schools Program projects), the knowledge base is generally limited to individual school evaluations and case studies. School types have been selected for examination with these knowledge limits in mind. Finally, and more fundamentally, the list for detailed examination consists largely of structurally differentiated types in preference to programmatically different types, since structure appears to have more to do than particular program with the potential of a school of choice for responding successfully to student need and family preference.

Open enrollment. The unfulfilled promise of plans for increasing family influence and control played a considerable part in generating the notion of individual choice: If families could not substantially influence what a school was and did, at least they might have the freedom to choose among schools. That falls something short of the power to specify what the options made available shall be, but it is a real gain to be in a position to make one's own choice among several possibilities—or at least initially it appeared a real gain. This was the promise of open enrollment. The cities where it has been tried include Chicago, Kansas City, St. Paul, New York, and Los Angeles (D. Levine, personal communication, November 4, 1983). Details regarding the plan as it continues to operate in one city today may suffice to show its general nature.

New York City's open enrollment plan was begun in 1960 to provide an opportunity for "parents of pupils in schools with a heavy concentration of minority groups . . . to transfer their children to schools with unused space and to an educational situation where reasonably varied ethnic distribution exists" (Board of Education, City of New York, 1963). Thus, from the start, open enrollment was not construed so much as a choice plan as a voluntary desegregation option made available to minority individuals. The plan continues in operation today with a slightly expanded purpose. The Free Choice Transfer Program, as it is now titled, operates to help stabilize schools in changing neighborhoods and maintain racially balanced enrollments, to integrate schools, and to equalize school use (while maintaining ethnic balance) (J. Elias, personal communication, October 13, 1983). There is also now a Reverse Open Enrollment plan for white families in predominantly white schools, seeking an integrated setting. There are no official records on transfers under this plan, but the Office of Zoning and Integration unofficially reports there are few takers.

The open enrollment plan has enabled parents in some schools to transfer their children to designated "receiving" schools. At some schools they were initially permitted a range of choice; at others there were pairing arrangements designating which receiving school an open enrollment applicant would attend. In the former case, transfer applicants indicated several choices, and assignments were made on a first-come, first-served basis by the Board of Education's Central Zoning Unit. As the program operates today, "sending" schools have high concentrations of minority populations, and "receiving" schools have populations consisting of 70% or more white students. Parents can designate a stipulated "cluster" of schools as their first choice (and other clusters as second and third choices), but the choice among the schools designated as the cluster, as well as those constituting the cluster, is made by the Board of Education's Office of Zoning and Integration.

A 1967 study of New York's open enrollment program (Fox, 1967) found that it provided a genuine opportunity for a better education, as well as for a desegregated school, for families choosing open enrollment. Although qualitative differences were less pronounced at the elementary level, receiving junior high schools were consistently judged superior to the sending schools with respect to teacher functioning, pupil functioning, and overall school quality. Tellingly, more than two-thirds of the observers of the evaluation team reported they would be enthusiastic about enrolling their own children in one of the receiving schools, and an equal number would be negative about enrolling their children in one of the sending schools.

The open enrollment program has never attracted very large numbers of students. Between September 1961 and September 1963, the transfers effected for youngsters in grades 3–5 numbered 13,118. During the current 1983–84 school year, only 1,143 new transfers have been effected under the program (Archer, 1983). As a percentage of eligible enrollment totals, these figures are quite small. It is possible that the restrictions on choice are a factor (i.e., being able only to designate a group of schools, not to choose a particular school), or that the socioeconomic status of the inner city clientele of most schools designated as sending schools explains their relative lack of use of the choice option (Bridge & Blackman, 1978). Still another factor, however, may well be the limited value of choice in the absence of differentiation. If there are no clear grounds for distinguishing one option from another—no differences, for example, in curriculum or instructional approach—then the opportunity to choose may be thought quite limited. In fact, despite the qualitative differences between sending and receiving schools noted above, it may be that choices under the circumstances described are more typically a matter of "fleeing from" than "moving to." Where substantial and visible differences are evident, larger numbers might reasonably be expected to take advantage of the choice opportunity.

Magnet schools. So far as numbers affected are concerned, the idea of family choice in education received a tremendous boost from a 1976 amendment to the federal Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA). The amendment authorized grants to support the planning and implementation of magnet schools in districts involved in desegregating. It stimulated the nation's first widespread attempts to establish real options *systems*, as opposed to one or two alternative schools. Since 1976, magnets have become a prominent part of the desegregation plans of a number of urban districts where it has been assumed that distinctive, attractive theme programs could draw students across racial lines. Magnets have been perceived, then, as voluntary alternatives to forced busing. But they have also increasingly been seen as an effective means of enhancing the quality of education and as a rather reliable route to improved parent satisfaction and public confidence.

A recent study identified more than a thousand magnet schools and programs in districts of 20,000 or more students (Fleming, Blank, Dentler, & Baltzell, 1982). Approximately one-third of the nation's districts of this size now have magnets (Blank et al., 1983). They are largely an urban phenomenon, and they are more numerous in the Northeast, Midwest, and West than elsewhere. Cities that have magnets now collectively enroll between 1% and 37% of the student population in them, depending on district goals and the number of magnets made available (Blank et al., 1983). Most of these programs (59%) are at the elementary level, where the distinctive feature designed to attract students and their families is a certain type of pedagogical style or environment (e.g., traditionalist programs, open or free schools, Montessori schools). At the high school level, the distinctive feature is typically a curricular concentration emphasizing particular disciplines (e.g., math and science), particular career areas (e.g., health services),[2] or particular themes (e.g., environmentalism, multiculturalism).

Magnets are defined as schools (a) that offer a special or distinctive program attractive to students of all races; (b) that students enter on a voluntary basis; and (c) which are, in fact, racially mixed and thus serve to decrease segregation (McMillan, 1980). However, as the magnet idea has matured and additional concerns have shaped public discussion, a shift has gradually occurred in magnet school orientation—or, more properly, an expansion has taken place, from an exclusive preoccupation with effecting desegregation to include "an emphasis on providing quality education or educational options for the district" (Fleming et al., 1982). Shifts in emphasis have paralleled the discovery that magnets are somewhat less effective in desegregating schools than had been hoped, but a great deal more effective in improving educational quality, and simultaneously, school image and support.

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[2] Career magnets tend to differ from traditional vocational schools by virtue of their focus on career *areas* (e.g., aviation) rather than on specific careers (e.g., aviation mechanic). They thus attract students of differing talents, abilities, and career aspiration levels.

The ESAA grants for magnet schools had been intended solely for desegregation purposes. Indeed, then Assistant Secretary of Education Mary Berry asserted that there was no evidence whatsoever regarding their educational effectiveness (Middleton, 1977). They have subsequently been found helpful in reducing the number of students in racially isolated schools and in aiding in districtwide desegregation efforts. Magnets have been maximally successful in desegregating districts where the minority population numbers less than 30% of the total student enrollment, and/or where there are several minorities (Fleming et al., 1982; Rossell, 1979). And they are also widely thought to be more effective as a part of a desegregation plan than as a total plan (Blank et al., 1983; Royster, Baltzell, & Simmons, 1979). Certainly, the opportunity to choose a school has reduced tensions and conflict in districts where busing has been mandated (Blank et al., 1983), but magnet school enrollment continues to average only 5% of enrollment totals in districts offering such programs. Mean percentage varies considerably, of course, with the number of magnet openings available to students in a given district (Blank et al., 1983), so this total may be a better indicator of how extensively districts have gone into magnets than of magnet popularity among students and parents. The most recent and extensive magnet school study concludes that the contributions of such schools to districtwide desegregation are directly related to such variables as district purposes, which are not always districtwide desegregation but can, for example, pertain simply to desegregating particular schools. Levels of district commitment and local implementation are also crucial success determinants, and these can range from weak and ambivalent support, and quite minimal change at the school level, to high levels of conviction and innovation.

Magnet schools have been extremely successful in some regards. They often introduce programs of high quality into areas that have despaired of seeing such change. The report on magnets commissioned by the Department of Education (Blank et al., 1983) applied two kinds of quality assessment: processes and arrangements observable daily in the school, and student achievement outcomes. The processes pertained to such diverse factors as task-related behavior, interaction and communication, reflections of a sense of community, and mission-activities congruence. The achievement outcomes consisted of test scores in math and reading. Combining these quality assessments, investigators were willing to call one-third of their sample high quality schools—a figure low enough to confirm that magnets are not the long-sought model that comes with guarantees, but substantial enough to display the model's potential, and to rank it quite favorably in relation to most urban schools.

The study also found other sorts of success to be associated with magnet schools. One unanticipated finding was "the discovery . . . that the degree of interest in, and commitment to, magnet schools at the local level is much higher than anticipated from existing research and reports" (p. 17). Relatedly, they discovered, "some local school boards, administrators, teachers and parents are finding magnet schools to be valuable as an approach to revitalization and reform of their schools" (Blank et al., 1983, p. 17). The sense of promise emanates from the innovative quality of a number of the programs, staff commitment and dedication to them, and a shared perception of "specialness" on the part of teachers and students, generating an unusual camaraderie. The reasons for this, in turn, may relate to teacher interest in the theme and to better student behavior and performance by virtue of learner interest. As one teacher put it, "I can *teach* here. I don't have to worry about motivating (and disciplining) students" (Blank et al., 1983, p. 54). Undoubtedly, additional school environment factors are also involved, such as coherence and clear mission, and the opportunity (indeed, the need) of teachers to develop their own curricula.

Staff is not the only group to respond positively to magnet schools. On such indicators as approval expressed, behavior, participation, and attendance, students like magnets (Fleming et al., 1982; Stanley, 1982). Parent satisfaction rates are invariably higher in magnets than in other schools (Blank et al., 1983). But even among adults who do not have children attending them, magnets also generate perceptions of quality (Fleming et al., 1982). The explanations of such a positive response are not entirely clear. Undoubtedly the presence of choice—the voluntary nature of magnets—is a factor in student enthusiasm. And quite probably, attributes already noted—student interest in the magnet theme, the unusual commitment of staff, the innovative nature of the programs, the coherence and climate of "specialness"—contribute to student enthusiasm. Evidently, however, one earlier supposed factor in parental enthusiasm is not a contributor: Parent involvement levels appear neither high nor unique as to type. Parents may be involved, but if so, it is typically in roles created for community members, not explicitly for parents (Blank et al., 1983). Magnets do seem to have generated some rather unusual involvement patterns with local citizens, organizations, and institutions, and these may well figure in some of the enthusiasm of local adults without youngsters in these schools. People in fields and organizations related to the magnet theme sometimes perform instructional functions, both in the school and elsewhere, as, for example, the supervisors of interns. But magnets have also generated more novel connections. For instance, there are cases of magnet-university linkage whereby the university provides diverse forms of technical assistance in a continuing relationship. Magnets are involved in adopt-a-school programs, and private organizations have also provided unusual sorts of services to them, as in the case of a corporation that loaned a school district two marketing executives to assist in designing a recruitment strategy for its new magnets.

As the foregoing suggests, magnet schools offer a number of advantages as a family choice model: They contribute to desegregation, to school revitalization and quality education, and to student, parent, and community satisfaction levels, hence to the restoration of public confidence in the schools. There are also, however, some problems in their implementation and some unanticipated negative consequences of their operation.

First, magnets seem to be in a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't position with respect to their desegregation purpose. If they fail to attract sufficient numbers of whites or of minorities, they have of course failed to desegregate. On the other hand, if they are too successful in attracting either majority or minority students, they tend to resegregate or "ghettoize" in the absence of quotas. And if quotas or insufficient spaces bar applicants, complaints are understandable. These fundamental difficulties have sometimes yielded cases where individuals and groups have felt particularly abused—for example, blacks who have been deprived of attending a nearby magnet while whites who have chosen it are welcomed and bused in in the interests of achieving racial balance—and neighborhood schools are left less racially balanced due to the exodus of youngsters leaving for a magnet school.

In addition to the finding of several studies that the overall contribution of magnets to desegregation is slight, there have also been cases where magnets have actually appeared to decrease overall desegregation by concentrating it in the magnet schools, that is, by attracting a substantial portion of a relatively small minority away from regular schools and concentrating them in magnet schools. It is presumably consequences such as these that lead to such paradoxical and negative reports as a recent claim that "under voluntary desegregation plans in Houston, Flint, Michigan, and . . . in Los Angeles . . . the number of racially isolated schools actually increased" (Caldwell, 1982, p. 14).

Still another desegregation-related problem has been the admissions requirements of magnet schools. Although the requirements revealed by the recent study are hardly steep enough to support charges of "elitism"—and magnet teachers repeatedly report average student ability—it appears that 89% of the programs studied sought to screen out the most problematic students. Of these programs, only 13% were judged highly selective. But another 60% of the magnets sampled tried to avoid the "dumping ground" threat by means of modest entrance requirements, such as performance at grade level and the absence of serious social and behavioral problems. Such standards are understandable, but they can be seen as excluding precisely the group most in need of a different and better education. Moreover, investigators found that other forms of selectivity can also occur as a result of student self-selection, the focus and strategy of marketing magnets, and performance requirements for remaining in the magnet once admitted (Blank et al., 1983).

Such problems have been associated with charges of "skimming" and "draining," that is, that magnets tend to skim off the ablest and most motivated students, thus draining the most talented from other schools and contributing to the impoverishment and further ghettoization of such schools. Such consequences have produced charges that magnets establish a dual educational structure in large urban districts, in which they constitute "privileged subsystems" (Arnove & Strout, 1978)—privileged in that they are able to select their students and to get rid of those who fail to measure up.

There are other dimensions to charges of special privilege. In the first place, successful magnets are exempted from a number of standard district regulations and procedures. This may mean more favorable student-teacher ratios or greater advantage in determining schedules or in allocating budgets. In a number of districts it means higher per student costs. Although magnets at the elementary level frequently have *lower* per pupil costs than other local schools, these costs are typically *higher* in secondary-level magnets. This averaged, in the recent magnet school study, to an 8% overall differentiation in per student expenditures. Some of the greater costs are related, of course, to start-up expenses and decline sharply in 2 or 3 years. Others, however, relate to special equipment and facilities and to increased transportation costs. The magnet schools in the sample experience transportation costs 27% higher than nonmagnets, an unavoidable consequence in light of the desegregation purposes of magnets (Blank et al., 1983).

Finally, some have asserted that the nature of the case is that magnets cannot bring about ethnic and socioeconomic desegregation because of the choice provisions lying at their core. On the one hand, unless student affiliation is voluntary, you do not have a magnet program at all. On the other hand, in a family choice system, ethnically and class-related values associated with child-rearing enter into the choices different families make (Warren, 1978). And these, it is alleged, will not only perpetuate insidious differences, but will prove inimical to equal opportunity. To cite the example often given: The traits that appear to have well served lower class parents are obedience, docility, and deference to authority. It is natural, therefore, that such parents seek to instill these traits in their children. Yet the result is to differentiate them from middle class youngsters—whose parents value independence, assertiveness, and autonomy—and it may also be to limit their chances for upward socioeconomic mobility.

Some of these problems appear amenable to practical solution while others may be costs and paradoxes inherent in the magnet idea or, more fundamentally, the choice idea. It could well be that magnet development, like other policy proposals, would be desirable at the present juncture, given the problems we face today, while not representing a desirable permanent solution or a panacea. This is by no means an intent to damn with faint praise, however: Possibily it is the misguided search for permanent solutions that makes practical response to our problems so difficult. Given public education's current straits—segregation, quality and enrollment declines, lack of public confidence—widespread adoption of magnet schools might well serve multiple purposes, and serve them better than the other policy alternatives open to us.

There has now been sufficient investigation of magnets to suggest what features conduce to their success. The following have been listed as the traits constituting the "ideal design for magnets," as recommended by the findings of the recent study by Blank et al. (1983):

(1) districtwide access for students on the basis of voluntary preference;
(2) a curricular theme that is definite, appealing, and distinctive;
(3) a principal and a staff capable of accomplishing the theme as it has been presented to the public;
(4) instruction that is regularly reviewed by the school district for its rigor and fairness, that is, accountability;
(5) a facility and site selected on the basis of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic neutrality;
(6) good transportation and school security services;
(7) student and staff composition that closely reflects the racial and ethnic composition of the community;
(8) a method of checks and balances that will prevent segregation or educational deprivation in nonmagnet schools; and
(9) start-up funds for facilitating early success in implementation.

Schools within schools. As we move from a close look at magnets to schools within schools, a switch in category *types* must be noted. Indeed, some of the magnet schools just discussed are schools within schools. Other schools within schools, however, have been alternatives, that is, localized programs of choice in districts where they may be the sole alternative to the regular program, or perhaps

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one of two. In fact, a growing number of alternatives have, over the years, been housed in a parent school. As of 1982, a fifth of the nation's alternatives were schools within schools (Raywid, 1982).

The school-within-a-school model related closely to at least two prominent themes of the sixties. One was the perception of the typical school system as an overblown, impervious bureaucracy; the second was a desire to render schools as humane and supportive institutions. Although the idea of rendering large schools smaller and more personalized through administrative division did not start with alternative education, it was certainly developed and extended through alternatives. The literature of the forties and fifties shows some reports of "little school" or "unit" plans. Most typically these were intended to make large schools more personalized, but not to affect the instructional program, and certainly not to bring about any sort of diversification. Indeed, how to maintain uniformity under such conditions was sometimes noted as a challenge. In the sixties, alternatives adopted and extended the organizational format, using it to rather different purposes.

A school within a school, or SWAS, is an administrative unit created within a larger school. It gains separateness and distinctness by having its own students and teachers, its own courses and space and distinctive environment. Most schools within schools are probably at the secondary level where a personalized environment is likely to be most lacking. They have tended to be small in relation to the parent school, with varying degrees of separateness from it: In some schools within schools, students take all of their course work within the SWAS from its teachers; in others, they pursue a part of their studies in the larger school or even in other schools.

Schools within schools have from the start tended toward one of two populations. A number have consisted of bright, interested youngsters demanding more from their educations than the conventional high school was providing (Type I). Schools within schools associated with such populations have often been highly innovative, exciting, challenging and demanding places. In my own Long Island area, the examples that come to mind are the school within a school in Old Westbury and that in Woodmere, which both continue oversubscribed and highly respected, and the two very different but equally attractive alternatives in the Scarsdale area, in Scarsdale and Edgemont High Schools. All four of these schools attract youngsters of high ability and potential, and although some outsiders may consider their educational tastes unusual, there is no question about the status of the students or the program.

A second kind of SWAS (Type II) is far more typically created from administrator perception of need than from student or teacher desire for better education. The instigation usually comes in the form of a group of underachieving, dropout-prone, and perhaps disruptive youngsters. This sort of SWAS was also among the earliest alternatives, and its numbers continue to grow as a response to such varied administrative problems as enrollment declines and control difficulties. The motive in this kind of SWAS is usually the solution of a problem rather than provision of an improved education. Poor organizational arrangements have sometimes made it difficult in this kind of SWAS to claim the advantages recommending the SWAS idea in the first place, although there exist some outstanding and highly successful Type II programs.

The SWAS organizational form can be combined, of course, with any number of instructional programs and emphases, so it offers significant advantages. There are schools within schools that are traditionalist or open, that feature specific themes, that operate full days or part days, that send their students to internships or work-study programs for part of the day, that pursue Foxfire type programs, "walkabouts," and advanced placement courses. The SWAS format has been chosen for some magnet programs where existing facilities or program size have not recommended separate housing, and it has been a frequently used arrangement for alternative schools (Raywid, 1982). Its flexibility and adaptability to various settings are strong advantages. SWAS programs can be set up in large schools or relatively small ones; they can be urban, suburban, or rural; elementary or secondary; and since the sixties many such programs have emerged in these various settings. Several of the contemporary reports on education seem to be recommending the SWAS arrangement, including the Goodlad (1983c), Carnegie (Boyer, 1983), and Sizer (1984) studies.

The major challenge to schools within schools has been obtaining sufficient separateness and autonomy to permit staff members to generate a distinctive environment and to carry out their own vision of schooling. There is considerable evidence suggesting that one key element of the success of alternative schools—the high morale and dedication of their staff—is due in large part to the greater professional autonomy of their teachers. If that is so, then the less the departure from normal bureaucratic practice and requirements, the smaller the gain is likely to be. Sufficient departures from conventional school organization are more difficult in the SWAS arrangement than in others, such as satellite alternatives or independent programs (Rand, 1981). Building principals typically seek adherence from all personnel and units to regulations and procedures that may seriously conflict with SWAS needs. Decorum is one frequent source of difficulty, since a number of SWAS programs deliberately cultivate less formality. Scheduling is another area of difficulty, and disciplinary procedure is yet another. Although in principle being part of a larger unit facilitates sharing of resources and opportunities, in practice the arrangement is sometimes difficult and frustrating (Blank et al., 1983; Institute for Scientific Analysis, 1976; Rand, 1981). I have seen few SWAS programs whose staff find the advantages of proximity to the larger school to outweigh the disadvantages.

Ironically, the Type I programs described above—attracting able students seeking a better education—are more likely to have open admissions policies than are the Type II programs for problem students. Type I SWAS staff frequently rely heavily on self-selection in admissions, sometimes augmented by a judgment on whether an applicant seems likely to become a real member of the SWAS "community." Type II programs have more to lose in unwise admissions, and must frequently counter moves that would make them dumping grounds for all those the larger school would like to be rid of. This puts them in a difficult position. On the one hand, parent school administration may see the SWAS as existing precisely for that purpose. On the other hand, SWAS staff often take the position that no single type of program can accommodate the range of students meeting difficulty in the conventional school, and that they should be asked to deal only with those students who look like prospectively successful SWAS students. (Two sorts of considerations make this a particularly reasonable stance. The first is that the dumping ground schools appear to be less successful than those reflecting a range of ability and motivation. The second is that Type II SWAS programs are often judged, and their fates determined, by their success rates. The "dumping" of predictably impossible cases is thus a substantial threat.)

As this suggests, the choice provision at the core of all alternative education is often modified—qualified and/or supplemented—in Type II SWAS programs. On the one hand, the alternative may be limited to those students who are recommended by guidance counselors, and on the other, it may have its own entrance requirements which must be met in order for a student to be admitted. Typically the latter are largely attitudinal, and these recommendations and requirement provisions need not operate to seriously restrict individual choice. Practitioners tend to emphasize the importance of not making the alternative a forced choice or "last chance" alternative to suspension, since voluntariness is taken to be critical. The centrally important building of espirit de corps is tied to rendering the program attractive to its students—a feat made all the more difficult if they are "sentenced" to it (Graham, 1980; Wehlage, Stone, Lesko, Nauman, & Page, 1982).

Minischools. The minischool idea emerged from the same forebears as the SWAS concept. The original intent was to increase personalization and participation by dividing entire schools into smaller administrative units, each with its own staff and students. As previously noted, the house or unit plan did not seek any diversity among units, however, and in fact randomized assignment and efforts at uniformity were sometimes recommended (Price, 1962; "School Within a School," 1959). As adapted by the alternatives movement in the late sixties, however, the minischools resulting from the division of the larger school were to deliberately cultivate diversity. In most, that differentiation pertained to instructional arrangements. Haaren High School in New York, for example, was divided into 14 minischools, including College Bound, Aviation, Automotive, Work-study, Traditional, and Urban Affairs. The list accurately reflects the two different emphases that have articulated various sets of minischools: One basis of differentiation has been curricular, the other has been instructional setting and approach.

Quincy Senior High School II in Quincy, Illinois, was divided into seven schools: Traditional; Flexible, featuring responsiveness to individuals via modular scheduling and otherwise; PIE, the Project to Individualize Education, emphasizing personal development as well as academic achievement; Fine Arts; Career; Work-study; and Special Education.

Minischools at the elementary level, as well as some high schools, tended to diversify primarily in terms of instructional approach or environment, rather than curriculum. Thus, a plan in Mt. Clemens, Michigan, called for dividing the high school into four minischools or "houses": Traditional; Comprehensive, offering a family type of setting; Challenge, based on the walkabout idea; and Sequoyah, for those with intense academic interests. The minischools created in Alum Rock elementary schools included Basics, Individualized, Open, and Learn by Doing programs.

Checks with the several schools cited suggest that the minischool arrangement may be a less durable organizational form than others. Quincy II has reverted to a single administrative structure. Haaren was combined several years ago with another school to form a new high school, Park West, which does retain the minischool structure, but with new options. In Alum Rock, many of the 50 minischool programs[3] were gone even before the project ended, and none remained by the time the final report was written (Bass, 1978).

Are explanations identifiable? Several likely factors occur. One strong possibility is that the decision to convert to a minischool organization is likely to be an administrative decision rather than a full staff decision. It is thus likely to represent the top-down change strategy that was associated with so many of the failures of the sixties (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975). As such, staff commitment and implementation may have remained minimal and the ensuing programs virtual "non-events," in John Goodlad's terms (1983a). Another plausible reason is that the focus on redesigning curriculum and instruction may well have ignored or underestimated the importance of general school environment and culture, making significant, durable change unlikely (Sarason, 1971). Still another possibility is that as a top-down arrangement, minischools may be instituted with a lot less planning time and effort than is typically required of a single SWAS program before it is granted formal authorization to open. Planning for the original minischools in Alum Rock had to be completed between the end of April, when the grant was awarded, and June 9, when parents had to make their choices (Levin, 1973). Sometimes recouping is possible and insufficient planning can be offset by the provision of sufficient staff development time and assistance. But not all minischools have enjoyed this sort of opportunity either.

The Rand (1981) investigation of Alum Rock, Minneapolis, Cincinnati, and Eugene, Oregon, concluded,

> Perhaps the most complex problem in a system of alternatives is managing multiprogram schools. . . . Teachers perceive more tension and conflict in multiprogram sites than in separate-site alternatives. Our findings also suggest that an alternative has a better chance of offering a distinctive educational program if it is organized as a separate site. (p. 65)

Paradoxically, the solution to the tensions and conflicts mentioned seems to be the blurring of the distinctiveness of the programs. Thus, minischools may be caught in a situation stacked against their full development and success.

Satellites and separate alternatives. Separate-site alternatives have been of two main sorts: satellites and separate schools. The two accounted for almost half (47%) of the programs responding to the 1982 alternatives survey. Most (38%) were separate schools, with 9% satellites of other schools. The satellites are annexes with administrative ties to a parent school. The director of the alternative reports to the school principal, and resources of the parent school may remain available to students and staff in the alternative (e.g., classes, extracurricular activities, transportation, secretarial services). Satellites have been housed in other schools, temporary units, and especially in the case of "outposts"—satellites deliberately scattered in an area in order to attract dropouts—store fronts, warehouses, or church space.

People in individual alternatives are likely to prefer the satellite arrangement to the SWAS or minischool structure. Separate housing permits them greater freedom in designing and carrying out their plans and precludes the sorts of tensions and conflicts mentioned earlier. More than half the teachers in multiprogram sites in Alum Rock and Minneapolis said they would prefer to be in single-program schools (Rand, 1981). If this was the case where the several programs were of generally equal status, with equal claim to prevailing in conflicts of interest, it seems reasonable to assume that a single SWAS would find it even more strongly advantageous to have its own separate facilities.

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[3] Nomenclature difficulties intrude once again: As used here, some if not all of the Alum Rock programs were schools within schools, since at least some occurred in buildings where the old or regular program remained intact.

Is the situation such, then, that the further removed the better? Is separate status always preferable to satellite? Not always. It may have distinct programmatic advantages for the alternative in a limited system, but the separate alternative in an options system is sometimes subject to continuing tendencies toward fragmentation and departure from the alternative's design (Rand, 1981). Such a tendency does not seem to arise in cases where there are only one or two alternatives in the district. In such programs, staff cohesiveness and collegiality are high, usually bringing a high degree of program unity. But alternatives systems may necessarily involve teachers who are less committed and share less with their colleagues. Perhaps it is partly for this reason that investigators have spoken of the need for strong, directive site administrators in such programs.

Separate or autonomous alternative schools also risk another sort of difficulty. Without ties to a parent school they are not easily placed within a table of organization. They cannot always make themselves heard or their needs felt when resources are allocated or policies adopted, and they are typically uniquely dependent on the particular central office administrator to whom they report. If that individual is replaced, or becomes less than supportive, the alternative may be in trouble. And even given continuous administrative support, alternatives in this organizational situation have not been firmly entrenched in the district structure. In the case of budget pullbacks or changes in board majorities, they are more visible and easier to eliminate. Thus, the increased autonomy of the separate or independent alternative may come only at the price of increased vulnerability.

Interdistrict choice plans. The alternative, magnet, and specialty schools described in preceding sections have been offered in single school districts and made available to youngsters living in the district. However, a number of family choice programs have also been made available on an interdistrict basis. This arrangement seems likely enough to become a trend to warrant special notice here.

The first interdistrict schools of choice were, like other alternative schools, individual or localized efforts. In some cases, as many as eight contiguous districts agreed to the sponsorship of a single alternative school. This was the case with the Shanti School in Hartford. Many districts make their schools available to out-of-district students on an individual tuition basis; and there is precedent, particularly in the case of special education students, of districts assuming the tuition costs of enrolling a youngster in a neighboring district program. But there is no reason why school districts could not establish arrangements comparable to the larger scale program that several hundred colleges and universities have worked out in the form of tuition exchange programs for the children of faculty. There, colleges sending a student to any one of the member institutions in effect get debits; admitting colleges get credits; and over a several-year period each institution must maintain a reasonable balance of trade. On a more limited geographic basis, there is no reason why comparable arrangements could not be worked out for suburban areas. And there is excellent reason why this might be highly desirable. As an example, take the schools of Long Island, New York. East of the New York City limits, Long Island is divided into two counties and a total of 134 school districts. Collectively, they enroll a total of 447,000 students, but some of these districts are extremely small and don't even maintain their own high schools. A diversified magnet program would be out of the question in most of these districts. But why not a magnet program on a countywide basis? And it is not just a matter of magnet possibilities: Other sorts of schools of choice are often highly distinctive. The localized alternatives especially seem to take on their own personalities. Thus, two presumably comparable alternative schools in two neighboring districts may differ extensively as to school climate and culture. It might well be, then, that the alternative in the next district would appear a better fit for a particular youngster than the home district alternative. Why not a standing cross- or interdistrict enrollment plan expediting the most educationally promising choices in such cases?

Here, again, desegregation concerns have provided a powerful assist in the devising of interdistrict enrollment plans. In St. Louis, a plan involving the city and 23 suburban districts facilitates the voluntary enrollment of city minority youth in suburban, predominantly white schools. The plan is to bring black enrollments to 15–25% of population totals in the suburban schools within 5 years. The city is simultaneously improving its magnet program to attract white suburban students.

A similar arrangement has been mandated for two Michigan school districts, Coloma and Benton Harbor, after Coloma was found liable for Benton Harbor's segregation, having permitted a number of white transfers into its schools (Mirga, 1983). Observers believe that the notion of cross-district liability may eventually lead to extensive interdistrict enrollment plans, linking urban and suburban schools. And in such an event, experience has shown that arrangements offering voluntary enrollments are likely to be much more amicable (Blank et al., 1983), as well as more effective (Royster et al., 1979), than forced busing plans.

Several states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin, have adopted cross-district enrollment plans facilitating voluntary transfers that will reduce racial imbalance (McMillan, 1980). Wisconsin's 7-year-old plan has contributed to Milwaukee's desegregation effort. It provides state financial incentives both to sending and receiving districts. When a student transfer from one district to another contributes to desegregation, the sending district continues to receive state aid for that student, while the receiving district is reimbursed by the state for the full cost of educating and transporting the student (Bennett, 1984).

Dwindling enrollments are also beginning to stimulate cross-district enrollment plans. And in any situation where there is cause to worry about community receptivity to the need for busing, schools of choice are a likely means of reducing resentments. The combination of financial austerity and demands for specialty programs may also stimulate the growth of cross-district option plans and interdistrict sponsorship of single alternative programs.

Conclusion

Having examined the variety of family choice arrangements recently provided in public education, some concluding comments on their merits and prospects are in order. We shall look first at localized alternatives, then at systems of alternatives.

A great many of the dramatic achievements associated with alternative schools have occurred in programs representing the single alternative in their districts. It was, in fact, the success of such programs—often with apathetic and dissatisfied students, and sometimes with seriously underachieving youngsters as well—that initially recommended alternatives to many sponsors. These individual early programs often brought markedly improved student attendance and enhanced attitudes toward school and learning (Janssen, 1974; Smith, Barr, & Burke, 1976). Discipline problems were substantially eliminated (Duke & Perry, 1978) and violence disappeared (Berger, 1974). Moreover, in schools where standard achievement measures could be used as grounds for comparisons (e.g., test scores and college admissions), they showed that alternatives students "perform at least as well as their counterparts in traditional school programs, and usually better" (Janssen, 1974, p. 6). Later studies have confirmed that alternatives

> typically lead to greater academic achievement on the part of their students. At least some alternatives send a substantially higher percentage of their graduates on to college than do comparable schools in the same district . . . [and] . . . inquiries to date suggest that alternative school graduates may outperform the others in college." (Raywid, 1981, p. 553)

Such findings would suggest that localized alternatives—that is, in districts where they are the only alternative, or perhaps one of just two or three—manage to provide environments and programs considerably more responsive to some students than other local schools have proved. This seems true of youngsters of varied ability and performance levels, although the evidence is of course more stunning with those who have previously been unsuccessful in school.

Comparable findings have also been associated with alternatives *systems*. Magnet schools present a strong case in point. They claim heightened student interest and improved attendance and behavior records. There are staff benefits as well, with evidence of increased levels of commitment and satisfaction (Fleming et al., 1982). Moreover, since alternatives systems obviously affect more students than individual alternatives could reach, it makes sense to speak of magnet schools as a rather effective reform mechanism for improving teacher performance and the overall quality and effectiveness of schools. In addition, and central to the focus of this paper, an options system of diversified schools can offer a range of alternatives for family choice, whereas the existence of just one or two alternatives to the mainstream school hardly assures broad responsiveness to diverse educational preferences. It also seems clear that no single alternative can respond to the diverse needs and interests of all students not well served by the conventional school (Fizzell, 1975). Quite possibly a range of environments and approaches is needed (Fizzell, 1980; Ghory & Sinclair, 1978). Thus, a set of magnet schools, reflecting an array of emphases, would obviously offer students more chances to find a program matching their particular needs or interests than could the availability of just one alternative to the conventional school.

From the foregoing, it might appear that alternatives systems are localized alternatives writ large, offering many of the same benefits, plus more. Such a conclusion may not be quite accurate, however. Although there is insufficient evidence for a conclusion—and virtually no comparative findings on the two types of alternatives—one gets the sense that the pluses in alternatives systems schools are somewhat less pronounced and the gains more modest. If so, the evidence would suggest several possible explanations. First, of course, is that not all programs in an alternatives system are fully implemented. And sometimes even the designs for differentiated programs really yield very little differentiation and departure from standard practice (Rand, 1981). In these and other cases, limited benefits may be largely a matter of insufficient organizational and structural departure from standard arrangements. This paper has throughout assumed this kind of feature to constitute the crux of the matter. Our focus has been on displaying organizational characteristics rather than the curricular and instructional features which might also be used as a basis for typologizing and exploring schools of choice. The organizational approach suggests a number of features as important to the success of alternative schools, including the choice element for students and staff, smallness, flexibility, extended as opposed to narrowly defined student and staff roles, and staff autonomy and collegiality (Blank et al., 1983; Raywid, 1982; Wehlage, 1982). These features may be more prevalent, or present in greater degree, in particular localized alternatives than in the schools composing alternatives systems—possibly, in some cases even due to an "outcast" sort of status.

Where an alternatives system is adopted, at least two things happen that may reduce the success potential of individual programs. Creation of the system is a central decision, and the tendency may be strong to implement the alternatives according to procedures not unlike those for implementing other district-level decisions. This makes for a top-down pattern which may severely curtail the autonomy and sense of professionalized practice evident in localized alternatives. The plausibility of this explanation is underscored by the fact that in Minneapolis, the most successful of the early alternatives systems, the desire to diversify schools was paralleled by a desire for decentralized governance. (In the far less successful Alum Rock district, there was the commitment to decentralization but not to diversification.)

A second inevitable consequence of alternatives systems is to bring in teachers who had not and perhaps would not have been drawn to alternatives otherwise. This not only makes them lukewarm "choosers" of the particular programs they become associated with, but in the view of at least some observers, it brings in staff who are less dedicated and perhaps less able than those affiliated with a localized alternative.

Neither localized alternatives nor those in an alternatives system are without disadvantages. Localized programs have sometimes brought stigma to their students and staff from people outside who have demeaned the program, its clientele, or both. Although the evidence is mixed, there has been concern that alternatives might increase racial isolation; and family choice patterns clearly can increase socioeconomic segregation in schools of choice. Accordingly, there is concern that individual alternatives may become programs for minorities and the poor, on the one hand, and programs for the elite on the other. Such concerns appear well grounded in the case of alternatives which for well-intentioned reasons have been content with low performance levels from their students. More broadly, because a number of localized alternatives have focused on the affective and social dimensions of development, there has been concern that the cognitive has received insufficient emphasis. And outsiders have sometimes complained that the alternatives tend to mollycoddle their charges rather than forcing them simply to straighten up, conform, and produce.

Alternatives systems pose slightly different risks. Experience to date has suggested that "skimming" may be as big a problem as "dumping," that is, there is as much danger that the optional schools will drain the ablest students out of others as there is that particular options will in effect become dumping grounds for the weakest students. Ironically, the programs most closely tied and responsive to the immediate prospects of marginal students are likely to isolate such youngsters in alternatives that become dumping grounds for the weakest. And at the other end of the spectrum, it does clearly appear to be the case that it is the abler students whose parents exercise their options in choice systems. This has been fairly consistent experience across the country, from Alum Rock's alternatives (Bridge & Blackman, 1978) to New York's open enrollment plan (Fox, 1967).

Without doubt, parents of all socioeconomic levels and of children of all ability levels can be encouraged to exercise their options. But if the system is to be equitable in this regard, careful plans and extensive efforts are necessary. Educational options are not an arrangement immediately embraced and used by all. And paradoxically, some of the conditions that would contribute to rendering the choice arrangement more equitable in terms of use might simultaneously limit its educational advantages. For instance, Minneapolis's four choice models that were adopted citywide made it easier for parents to compare the alternatives, and to make an informed choice among them, than was possible among Berkeley's 23 options, or Alum Rock's 50 programs representing 10 models. Yet, such a ceiling on school innovativeness, and teachers' freedom to carry out their own visions of schooling, probably also puts a limit on the improvement potential of such an arrangement. Moreover, informed parent choice requires a stability of program that places limits on the alternative's capacity to make changes for the better.

An even more fundamental concern is raised by Albert Hirschman's (1970) examination of organizations and institutions in decline, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. He suggests that the exit option may impoverish the deserted institution in not just one but two ways: The leaver not only goes, but in choosing that course of action in preference to "voice"—that is, staying and insisting on improvements—he or she makes overall improvement in the institution less likely. Instead, then, of functioning as the discipline of market demand to force improvements, the effect may be to extend a kind of license to deteriorate even further. It is possible to construe the plight of inner city schools in just this way. Might the analysis also apply to neighborhood schools in districts offering options? This is what some have feared.

Of fundamental import of another sort is the objection that diversified schools will mean diversified learnings that will render commonality and national cohesiveness more remote. The argument for commonality has strong appeal today as prominent groups recommend an enlarged block of core courses to be taken by all students. Diversified schools are not necessarily incompatible with substantial common learnings, but the extent to which diversification can occur depends on the way in which core, or common learnings, requirements are written. If they are mandated in the form of specific course requirements and syllabi, as so many states seem to be doing, the opportunities for responding to parent choice and student need will be sharply curtailed. There are grounds for maintaining, of course, that educationally not only are diverse means *compatible* with common ends, but human diversity makes diverse means *essential* to the realization of common ends. A parallel case can and has been made with respect to loyalties and sentiments: Not only are pluralistic values and attachments compatible with national unity in a democratic society, they are essential to it.

Thus, the concept of diversified public schools for family choice remains a debated one. Should there be "alternatives," or should we instead continue to try to perfect a "one best system" for all? If to have alternatives, this review of the models of choice generated to date suggests that a choice of schools—as opposed to a choice merely of teachers, curriculum, or instructional methods—is both more meaningful and more viable. As to whether a small number of localized alternatives in a district is an arrangement that works better than a full options system, the evidence seems to suggest that each of these has the solutions to the operational problems looming largest for the other. The alternatives system has the solution to the problems of the localized alternative and vice versa: The single alternative school is often plagued by insecurity and a lack of understanding and support from colleagues and administration. The alternatives system typically provides assurance in these regards but encounters difficulty in enabling schools and teachers to devise and maintain distinctive educational environments. Those with experience in either of these arrangements have much to teach—and to learn from—those with experience in the other.

It would appear that neither localized alternatives nor alternatives systems can provide the long-sought perfect panacea. Problems in principle and in practice attend both. Nevertheless, one is struck with the virtues of the choice arrangement and its responsiveness to present conditions. Such responsiveness becomes apparent in the number and variety of advocates espousing choice arrangements. Many seem more intent on other purposes than on the provision of options. Some now look to the choice arrangement as the most promising strategy yet devised for transforming unsuccessful schools into effective ones. For others the choice arrangement represents the most viable hope for reallocating power in the school and redistributing functions. Still others see in schools of choice the seeds of organizations where collective bargaining agreements are not the major articulators of roles. And there are others who look to choice as the means of injecting competition and the discipline of the marketplace into school operation. Doubtless there are also some who see schools of choice as a way to maintain tracking arrangements and as a means to defusing inner city antagonisms against schools that do not work. There are also undoubtedly some who expect schools of choice to socialize and render employable young people who would otherwise remain problematic to society at large. And there are probably a number of school administrators whose current interest in alternatives lies more in maintaining enrollments than in providing options.

There is evidence for speculating that each of these purposes, both announced and unannounced, could be realized in the choices arrangement. There are also safeguards that can be introduced purposefully or otherwise to block the realization of most of them. Meanwhile, however, it seems likely that the impressively varied and not entirely compatible prospects that advocates have found in the choice arrangement will attract increasing support.

The present administration seems determined to encourage educational options, and a number of state officials have now espoused the idea explicitly for the public sector. The excellence in education movement may also prove a considerable source of support for options over the next several years. Many knowledgeable parents are already beginning to fear the probable effects of current preoccupations with excellence. Many will want something other for their youngsters than the increasingly detailed curricula and tests that states are mandating.

Moreover, when one learns that only 3% of the nation's high school students last year met the curricular recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education—and when one recalls the similarity of this and other current proposals to that advocated in 1959 by James Conant as suitable only for the top 15%—it seems likely that a great many alternatives to the "excellence" schools will be necessary (Conant, 1959; "Newsnotes," 1983). As the ex-chancellor of New York City's schools puts it, we can't just throw standards out to students with the message "those who can, do, and those who can't, won't" (Brown, 1983). If we are to save urban education—and perhaps the very life of the cities—we must be moved by dropout rates as well as by images of excellence. And as students of urban problems seem agreed, alternatives and options systems are among our greatest hopes for improvement (Chase, 1978; Levine & Estes, 1977). Nor is it just to the cities and the analysts of their problems that schools of choice appear necessary and attractive. Options have also grown steadily in suburban schools and are present in rural schools as well (Raywid, 1982). They are recognized not only as an answer for our most marginal students, but also as a source of challenging and fulfilling schooling for the ablest and the average. They are also perceived as a source of innovative and improved practice and a mechanism for renewal and quality enhancement. The steady proliferation of such schools suggests a real and continuing movement. Americans are evidently determined to have choice—not just outside the public sector but developed within it as well.

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AUTHOR

MARY ANNE RAYWID, Professor of Education and Chair, Department of Administration and Policy Studies, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11550. *Specializations:* School improvement plans, educational politics and policy, social and philosophical foundations of education, schools of choice.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND TEACHER DECISION MAKING IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

PATRICIA A. BAUCH
The University of Alabama
ELLEN B. GOLDRING
Vanderbilt University

Parent involvement and teacher decision making are dominant themes in the current debate over school restructuring. The literature suggests that as teachers become empowered, they may tend to view parents more as clients of education rather than as partners, thereby introducing a potential conflict into the interaction of parents and teachers. This study examines the nature of these relationships under different types of school choice options. Findings suggest that Catholic schools exhibit partnerships between parents and teachers. Multifocus magnet schools approximate a parent empowerment mode that embodies elements of consumerism. Single-focus public schools indicate traditional relationships between parents and teachers associated with bureaucratic decision making and teacher autonomy. The authors speculate that shared power between parents and teachers is a little understood concept that needs further exploration if new public school choice options are to be successful.

Since the nation entered the 1990s, debate over school restructuring has centered around two dominant themes, parent involvement and teacher schoolwide decision making (Conley, 1991;

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Johnson, 1990). In addressing these themes, schools have undertaken initiatives that alter the fundamental relationships between parents and teachers. These initiatives include school-based management, teacher participation in school decision making, increased parental involvement, and parental choice (Conley, 1991; Raywid, 1990). Under these initiatives, teachers, and in some cases parents, have opportunities to participate directly in school decisions by serving as members of school-governing bodies, local school councils, and advisory boards (Conley, 1991; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Smylie, 1992). Parents who choose the school their child will attend also participate as they exercise "consumer empowerment," because they are able to exit a school if they are dissatisfied with school decisions and are subsequently unable to make their voices heard (Hirshman, 1970).

The underlying assumption of restructuring as a reform strategy is that changing the roles of parents and teachers will lead to a partnership that can enhance schooling for all children (Elmore, 1990; Johnson, 1990). Such change involves a redefinition of roles and relationships in schools and a redistribution of power. However, models of teacher involvement in decision making suggest that as teachers participate in schoolwide decisions, they may tend to view parents as clients of education rather than as partners (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990). Attempting to protect their professional autonomy, teachers may resist parent participation. Despite this concern, reforms under way in many countries advocate both raising the power of teachers and intensifying parent involvement and empowerment (e.g., Macbeth, 1993), introducing a potential conflict into the interaction of teachers and parents.

Often, restructuring initiatives are found in urban schools that are experiencing shifting policy contexts and environmental uncertainties such as release from some state and district regulatory controls, declining economic and political support, and changing student populations. Their school improvement efforts, and in fact

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their very survival, is made urgent by their local efforts to maintain the support and involvement of their constituents, especially minority parents of middle and low socioeconomic status. Yet many studies indicate that minority parents and parents of low socioeconomic status seem least involved in their children's education and in school restructuring (e.g., Jones, 1995).

The purpose of this article is to examine the nature of the relationship between parent involvement and teacher decision making in three different types of school choice settings. We have chosen to examine urban schools of choice because they represent an evolving policy context and face some urgency in addressing parent-teacher relations in a shifting environment. Specifically we ask, Do parent involvement and teacher decision making go hand in hand? That is, are parents and teachers in schools of choice likely to work together as educational partners in assuring student success in school? Or, in some types of schools of choice, does either greater parent involvement or greater teacher decision making give one group an advantage in influencing decisions over the other?

This study was conducted in three types of urban high schools of choice in three metropolitan areas serving a large proportion of minority and low-income students: inner-city Catholic schools, public single-focus schools, and public multifocus magnet schools. The schools chosen for this study are in transition from middle- and lower-middle-class to working-class and poor families and from single-family dwelling units to apartments, including subsidized public housing. Yet these are families who exercise their opportunity to choose a particular school their children will attend.

PARENT-TEACHER ROLES UNDER SCHOOL CHOICE ARRANGEMENTS

The separate literatures on parent involvement and teacher decision making infrequently acknowledge their relationship to one another and the potential conflicts among evolving parent and teacher roles. In examining parent involvement, the work of Epstein and her colleagues is instructive here (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1992, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). She outlines six types of parent involvement, ranging from the traditional, passive ways in which parents have been involved in schools (e.g., attending school events, volunteering) to new ways in which families, schools, and communities interact jointly to influence children's learning and development and school improvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). For these latter types of involvement, schools include parents in school decisions and seek community resources to help strengthen school programs. According to Epstein, for this to happen, teachers must accord parents equal status in school policy development and help them obtain the community resources and services that families need. This typically has not been a role played by most teachers.

School choice plans provide parents with an alternative avenue to exercise participation. Special-purpose schools, usually smaller in size; and magnet schools, frequently associated with desegregation efforts, allow opportunities for parents to choose their children's school. It is thought that school choice will generate a desire for local school improvement and provide a mechanism for developing closer home-school relationships (cf. Coons & Sugarman, 1978; Friedman & Friedman, 1980; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Lieberman, 1989).

In schools of choice, there is often a tendency to change the bureaucratic pattern of formally defined and specified roles of teachers to more flexible role definitions (Raywid, 1990). In the establishment of such schools it is likely that new authority is transferred to a local school site whereby program planners are given responsibility for developing a distinctive program with a unique identity. As teachers work together to evolve a mission for their school, they must work out curriculum decisions, devise learning activities, and frequently collaborate with administrators and parents in the development of school policy (Raywid, 1990).

Likewise, because of the possible consumer relationship that schools of choice establish with students and thus with parents, teachers are expected to assume broader and more varied roles when interacting with parents than in nonchoice schools (Blank, Dentler, Baltzell, & Chabotar, 1983; Raywid, 1990). Many teachers find this arrangement inconsistent with their view of themselves as professionals, with the knowledge and experience to run their classrooms with autonomy and discretion (Lortie, 1975). This is also inconsistent with some parents' views that in choosing a school, they can expect professional teachers to make the necessary decisions for their child to succeed; however, increasingly upwardly mobile and middle-class families simultaneously want to be involved in those decisions (Bauch, 1987, 1988; Seeley, 1989, 1993).

It is important to note that under choice arrangements, parents may not necessarily be involved in school decision making.

> Yet in different terms, choice offers individual families more power than even direct participation in decisions would offer: Participation does not always assure influence, but the right to place one's child in a school one has chosen—and to remove that child if sufficiently motivated to do so—carries a guarantee of personal efficacy. (Raywid, 1990, p. 190)

Taken together, new roles of parent and teacher participation suggest new interrelationships in schools. Four patterns or modes of interrelationship may emerge. One type represents a parent empowerment mode in which teachers are not highly influential in decision making at the school, whereas parental involvement is very high. Another mode is a partnership mode whereby parents are involved and teachers and parents together exercise decision-making influence; a third mode is a more traditional or bureaucratic mode where neither parents nor teachers have much influence nor involvement; and a fourth mode is a teacher empowerment mode in which teachers influence decisions in accordance with their expertise either individually or collaboratively with other school personnel, but parents have little or no involvement in the school nor in decision making.

These modes are illustrative at best and help us frame the problem of balancing parent involvement and teacher decision making. They do not exhaust all possible interrelationships between parents and teachers, and in reality, they most likely interact with each other in a school setting depending on the issues involved. For example, there is some evidence that suggests that veteran teachers are less likely to be open to parents' requests and ideas than are novice teachers. Some studies suggest that teacher participation in decision making might be associated with low levels of parental involvement. Bauch (1988) found that parents who trust teachers' professional ability are less likely to be involved in schools. Stallworth and Williams (1982) reported that teachers support certain types of parental involvement but not empowerment in decision making, whereas Clarke and Williams (1992) found that teachers with more seniority, and presumably greater expertise, place less importance on parental involvement. In a study of teacher and parent attitudes toward parent involvement, Montandon (1993) found that the great majority of teachers had a negative attitude toward parent involvement, even though half the parents were interested in collaboration with teachers in making school decisions.

In summary, parent involvement has evolved from respect for teacher authority and professional expertise into a multiplicity of roles, ranging from fund-raising to participation on school governance councils. Increasingly, as Coleman (1987) argued, parents, particularly the increasing numbers who are well educated, are more inclined to criticize teachers, to undercut their authority, and to hold them in low regard. Declining economic resources for schools and continued demographic changes combined with rising calls for accountability are beginning to change traditional patterns of parent involvement. Neither teacher decision making nor parent control of the policies and functions of schooling alone seem likely to bring about the desired improvement in student learning. Rather, a partnership model of parent-teacher relations whereby parents and teachers work together to foster critical behaviors such as collaboration, planning, communication, and evaluation holds out future promise (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Swick, 1991).

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study addresses the following question: What is the nature of the interrelationships between parent involvement and teacher decision making under different school choice arrangements? As indicated earlier, this article explores parent-teacher relationships in three types of school choice settings representing different structural and governance arrangements: Catholic, public single-focus, and public multifocus magnet schools. Although public schools of choice share some organizational properties with Catholic schools such as a focused curriculum and greater teacher autonomy and teacher collaboration, parent-teacher relationships might vary under different structural arrangements or choice settings because of differences in the way these schools are organized and governed.

Catholic schools are governed by a parish or a diocese and are immediately under the direction of a local board, often consisting of primarily parents and the local pastor or bishop. On the basis of a growing body of research, Catholic schools are thought to be less bureaucratically organized than public schools, more open to parent involvement, and provide parents and students with a greater sense of community (Bauch, 1988; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Catholic schools seem particularly concerned with social relationships and a sense of caring (Kleinfeld, 1979; Lesko, 1988).

These findings are based on studies of Catholic high schools or comparisons of Catholic with traditionally organized public high schools. They do not examine some of the newer organizational restructuring that public schools have undertaken in the past two decades such as magnet schools and other choice options in the public school sector. For example, Witte and Walsh (1990) determined that public magnet schools were more like suburban public schools than traditional urban schools in Milwaukee in that they had higher levels of effective schools' characteristics such as parental involvement, teacher control, and more positive school environments.

Public magnet schools are governed by the local school district. In some cases, such as in Chicago, the schools may have their own local school council. Their organization is used as a strategy for desegregation resulting from court endorsements in the 1970s (Steel & Levine, 1994). They are racially mixed and designed to draw diverse students on a voluntary basis of choice by offering educational programs that are attractive to parents (Metz, 1986, 1990;

Raywid, 1985). Consequently, magnet schools have firm quotas and students are admitted frequently by lottery. In addition, they are often allowed to deviate from standard school practices in order to address the particular kinds of needs, interests, or talents of the students who choose the school (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1990; Raywid, 1985).

Charter schools are the newest policy option intended to decentralize educational governance by freeing schools of bureaucratic constraints and giving teachers, parents, and community representatives a chance to propose new approaches (Pipho, 1993). Beginning with Minnesota in 1991, as of July 1995, 19 states have enacted some type of charter school legislation. Operated by teachers, parents, and others from the public or private sector, charters are independent legal public entities, who in exchange for the waiving of some regulations are accountable to parents at the local level while the state, for the most part, stays out of the way (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994). No conclusive data are available yet to indicate whether the charter school concept will become a meaningful reform (Bierlein & Bateman, 1996). For these schools as well as other schools of choice, much will depend on how successfully parents and teachers can work together to restructure a century-old bureaucratic system.

DATA AND METHOD

Thirteen schools were chosen for this study, part of a larger sample of schools participating in a project on metropolitan high schools of choice. To be included in this study, schools had to meet the following criteria: (a) serve a large proportion of minority or low-income students, (b) admit all or a portion of their students through choice and a formal application process, and (c) draw a large portion of students from inner-city areas. The schools are located in three urban areas of the United States—Washington, DC, Chicago, and Chattanooga. Survey data were collected from all teachers and parents of seniors in these schools (cf. Bauch & Goldring, 1993, 1995).

Five urban Catholic schools are included in this study. The Catholic schools range in size from 250 to 700 students with an average of 12% of families with incomes below the poverty level. Two of the schools are private and three are diocesan. The two private schools serve 30% and 86% minority students, respectively. The diocesan schools serve 60% to 100% minority students, primarily African American or Hispanic. All students in these schools are enrolled in college preparatory programs. The diocesan high schools tend to be somewhat larger than the private schools and offer programs in college prep, business, and general education, although all students take an academic program.

The four single-focus public, or specialty schools, represent a recent development in American public schools. To give parents a choice and in hopes of attracting students who best fit what a school has to offer, some districts have established total school choice programs. These schools are organized academically around a single theme and attract students from a large cross section of the city. These schools have looser ties to the district office than other public schools through release from some regulatory codes and greater local school autonomy. One school focuses its programs around the agricultural sciences. It serves 230 students from primarily middle-income families, of whom 67% are African American and 22% are Hispanic. The second and third schools serve 370 and 440 students, respectively. They organize their curricular programs around college preparation and the performing arts, enrolling 100% African American students primarily from middle- to upper-middle-income families. The fourth school focuses on arts and sciences serving 400 students of whom 42% are African American. In these four schools, approximately 12% of students come from families below the poverty level.

The four multifocus public magnet schools are comprehensive high schools organized to achieve racial desegregation. Primarily they serve students on the basis of neighborhood assignment. They range in size from 2,200 to 3,400 students. Their magnet or choice programs are schools within schools, enrolling approximately 20% of the student body. These programs seek to prepare students for careers in the visual and performing arts or to enter college with a preparation in language and international studies, an international baccalaureate, or the humanities, respectively. Although these schools are intended to bring about racial integration, only one serves a diversity of students of whom approximately 11% come from families below the poverty level. The others serve predominantly minority students of whom approximately 18% come from families below the poverty level.

SAMPLE

All parents in this study are parent choosers. In other words, for purposes of this study, only parents who reported choosing these schools or their specific magnet programs were included.[1] In each school, all 12th-grade students were given questionnaires to hand deliver to their parents and return in a sealed envelope to a central collection point at the school upon completion. In most cases, homeroom teachers served as the collection point for a particular group of students, whereas in other schools surveys were deposited in a designated area. The total parent response rate for parent choosers across all schools was 56% (*n* = 661). Specifically, Catholic schools returned 60% (*n* = 265) of the delivered surveys, single-focus public schools and multifocus magnet school parents who chose the school returned 52% (*n* = 85) and 42% (*n* = 311), respectively.

To obtain teacher data, all teachers assigned to academic teaching areas (i.e., math, English, science, social studies, and foreign language) were given questionnaires to complete and return anonymously in a sealed envelope to a central collection point at the school, usually located in a mailbox area or the teachers' lounge. Teachers also had the choice of mailing their completed surveys to the researchers, which a few in each school did. The overall teacher response rate was 51% (*n*= 330). Single-focus public schools had the highest response rate (68%; *n* = 72), followed by Catholic schools (52%; *n* = 88) and multifocus schools (36%; *n* = 170). All teachers had an equal chance to complete and return the survey.

Although the response rates may raise some concern, especially for multifocus magnet schools, parent and teacher characteristics of the sample population closely resemble those reported by school officials. Nevertheless, it is impossible to rule out the impact of self-selection and its relationship to both parent involvement and teacher decision making. Parents and teachers who are more involved in the school may be more willing to complete questionnaires than those who are less involved. In contrast, uninvolved parents who have little communication with the school and teachers who are uncomfortable with parent involvement may have viewed the questionnaire as an opportunity to express their feelings. Both those who were involved and satisfied as well as uninvolved and dissatisfied had the same opportunity to respond. Nevertheless, we must be cautious in interpreting the results of this study.

INSTRUMENTATION

The initial parent survey for this research was based on questions used in previous surveys which examined relationships between parents and schools (Becher, 1984; Benson, Yeager, Wood, Guerra, & Manno, 1986; Erickson & Kamin, 1980; Goodlad, 1984; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Horn & West, 1992). Revised versions of the original questionnaire were used in a series of studies that examined Catholic schools regionally and nationally (Bauch, 1987, 1988; Bauch, Blum, Taylor, & Valli, 1985; Bauch & Small, 1986). Questions from the parent survey were adapted for the teacher survey and additional questions examining school organization and climate were added on the basis of information gathered from previously held site visits and interviews of parents, students, and teachers. The teacher and parent surveys were subsequently piloted in the spring of 1991 in Catholic and public schools of choice (Bauch & Cibulka, 1989). On the basis of these earlier analyses, final adjustments were made to the questionnaire.

PROCEDURES AND VARIABLES

This exploratory study presents the results of a descriptive analysis regarding the relationship between parent involvement and teacher decision making under three different types of choice arrangements: Catholic and public single-focus and multifocus magnet schools. The study focuses on two sets of variables: parent involvement and teacher decision making. The teacher decision-making variable set includes three variables: teacher influence in schoolwide decision making and teacher seniority and level of education as important proxy variables for teacher experience and expertise, because research has shown that veteran teachers have more influence on school decisions compared with younger, less experienced teachers and are likely to support more limited types of parental involvement (e.g., Clarke & Williams, 1992; Saxe, 1975).

Five variables, measured in a 5-point Likert scale, are used to measure parent involvement. The first variable measures a traditional and passive type of parent involvement: parent attendance at, and participation in, school events, such as attending school meetings and participating in fund-raising (eight items, $\alpha = .87$). In this role, parents indirectly support the school through their participation and involvement.

The second parent involvement variable indicates the level of parent participation in activities specifically related to their child's education; that is, visiting their child's classroom, coming to school to pick up their child's report card, or to straighten out a problem their child is having at school (four items, $\alpha = .69$). This variable seeks to determine the extent to which parents are involved in their child's education by overseeing, monitoring, observing, communicating, and problem solving (cf. Woods, 1993).

The third variable measures the extent to which parents report that the school seeks their advice in making school decisions on a variety of issues (i.e., finances, programs, personnel, policy, and goals) (13 items, $\alpha = .93$).

The fourth variable reports the extent to which parents indicate they have open, responsive communication with the school (four items, $\alpha =. 73$). This variable includes statements such as, the school makes efforts to ensure "good" communication between home and school, and parents perceive the school as a friendly, open place.

The final variable in the parent involvement set is one item that asked parents to report their agreement with the statement, "This

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Analysis

			Range	
Variable	M	SD	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Parent involvement				
Participation in school activities	2.27	0.96	1.00	5.00
Participation in child's education	2.43	1.07	1.00	5.00
Advice in decision making	2.03	0.92	1.00	5.00
Home-school communication	3.46	0.81	1.00	5.00
Opportunities for involvement	3.57	1.06	1.00	5.00
Teacher decision making				
Influence	2.45	0.43	1.90	2.95
Seniority	8.74	3.36	3.13	16.14
Education	2.78	0.45	1.67	3.45

school provides adequate opportunities for parents to be involved." This variable measures the extent to which parents perceive that the school provides strategies and mechanisms for involving parents.

Three measures comprise the teacher decision-making set. The first variable measures teacher reports about the level of influence teachers have in decision making in the school in such areas as budget, curriculum, programs, and staffing (five items, $\alpha = .82$). The second variable measures the number of years of teaching in the particular school, and the third variable measures the teachers' highest level of educational attainment. A summary of the variables in the analysis are presented in Table 1. An intercorrelation matrix displaying the variables in the analyses is presented in the appendix.

DATA ANALYSES

Canonical correlation was used to explore the relationships among the multiple parent involvement and teacher decision-making measures for the three different choice arrangements—Catholic and public single-focus and multifocus magnet schools. Three separate canonical analyses were conducted for each of the choice arrangements. This methodology was selected because the interest in this study concerned the strength of the interrelationships between the sets of multiple variables (Borg & Gall, 1989). Canonical correlation analysis creates two new variates, one from the five dependent variables of parent involvement and one from the three independent teacher decision-making variables, and considers the relationship between the two. Rather than exploring causal factors, the canonical correlation measures the strength of the overall relationship between the linear composites of the two sets of variables. The analysis also determines the weights, or contribution, of each individual variable in the set. A strong relationship indicates highly shared variance.

We conducted three separate canonical correlations, one for each school type, so we could determine within-type correlations. The correlations were standardized for each school type so that the statistical results could be compared across types.

RESULTS

CANONICAL RESULTS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

As indicated in Table 2, parents of Catholic school students reported moderate levels of parent involvement in both school-related activities ($\bar{X} = 2.49$, $SD = .94$) and educational areas, which includes monitoring homework and overseeing their child's education ($\bar{X} = 2.40$, $SD = 1.05$). Parents indicated, however, that they had little input in decision-making areas ($\bar{X} = 2.08$, $SD = .94$), although they perceived their communication transactions with the school as open and responsive ($\bar{X} = 3.63$, $SD = .82$). Parents agreed, nonetheless, that the school offers adequate opportunities for parents to be involved ($\bar{X} = 3.68$, $SD = 1.07$).

Similarly, teachers in Catholic schools reported moderate levels of influence in decision making ($\bar{X} = 2.86$, $SD = .14$). On average, they have 8 years of experience ($\bar{X} = 7.99$, $SD = .14$) and typically hold a BA or MA degree ($\bar{X} = 2.31$, $SD = .34$).[2]

Canonical correlation explores how these levels of parent involvement and teacher decision making interrelate with each other. The results of the first analysis are presented in Table 3. Shown in

TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables by Three Choice Arrangements

	Catholic		*Single-Focus*		*Multifocus*	
Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Parent involvement	(*n* = 265)		(*n* = 85)		(*n* = 311)	
Participation in school activities	2.49	(0.94)	2.53	(0.91)	2.07	(0.93)
Participation in child's education	2.40	(1.05)	2.41	(0.89)	2.41	(1.11)
Advice in decision making	2.08	(0.94)	2.23	(0.96)	1.93	(0.88)
Home-school communication	3.63	(0.82)	3.75	(0.66)	3.29	(0.77)
Opportunities for involvement	3.68	(1.07)	4.28	(0.87)	3.27	(0.99)
Teacher decision making	(*n* = 88)		(*n* = 72)		(*n* = 170)	
Influence	2.86	(0.14)	2.74	(0.22)	2.03	(0.15)
Seniority	7.99	(3.37)	4.60	(1.81)	10.44	(2.34)
Education	2.31	(0.34)	3.02	(0.21)	3.08	(0.14)

TABLE 3
Structure Coefficients, and Redundancies Between Parent Involvement and Teacher Decision-Making Variables and Their Corresponding Canonical Variate for Catholic, Single-Focus, and Multifocus Schools

	Coefficients		
Variable	*Catholic*	*Single-Focus*	*Multifocus*
Parent involvement			
Participation in school activities	.517	–.732	.428
Participation in child's education	–.432	.099	–.729
Advice in decision making	–.411	.120	–.247
Home-school communication	–.086	–.151	–.152
Opportunities for involvement	.434	–.505	.004
Percentage of variance	.16	.17	.16
Redundancy	.04	.05	.06
Teacher decision making			
Influence	.903	–.668	–.944
Seniority	.527	.482	–.782
Education	.295	–.452	–.634
Percentage of variance	.40	.29	.63
Redundancy	.11	.09	.22
Canonical correlation	.513	.545	.597

the table are the loadings between the variables and the canonical variate, within-set variance accounted for by the canonical variate, redundancies, and the canonical correlation for Catholic schools.

The analysis yielded a canonical correlation (R^2) of .513 ($p < .0001$), indicating that levels of parental involvement are associated with levels of teacher decision making in Catholic schools. The decision rules used for significant factor loadings recommend that a correlation between variables and variate (loadings) in excess of .3 be interpreted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). The variables in the parental involvement set that are correlated with the canonical variate are participation in school activities and in their child's education, advice in decision making, and perceptions of opportunities the school provides for parent involvement. Among the teacher set of variables, all three correlated with the canonical variate.

The specific loadings indicate that in Catholic schools, participation in school events (.517) and an overall sense that there are adequate opportunities for parental involvement (.434) are positively related to teacher decision making, whereas participation in their child's education (–.432) and advice in decision making (–.411) were negatively related to levels of teacher influence in decision making (.903), teacher seniority (.527), and teachers' level of education (.295).

The canonical variate pair (correlation) extracts 16% of the variance from the parental involvement set of variables and 40% of the variance from the teacher decision-making variables. The redundancy index indicates that the parental involvement variate accounts for 4% of the variance in the teacher variables, whereas the teacher decision-making variate accounts for 11% of the variance in the parental involvement set.

Overall, in Catholic schools, these results suggest that a combination of more involvement in school activities and opportunity for involvement, but less participation in decision making and less involvement around child's educational issues, correspond with more teacher influence in decision making, specifically among teachers with more seniority.

CANONICAL RESULTS FOR SINGLE-FOCUS SCHOOLS

Parents in single-focus schools also report moderate levels of parental involvement in school activities ($\bar{X} = 2.53$, *SD* = .91) and participation in their child's education ($\bar{X} = 2.41$, *SD* = .89). However, they indicate that communication is very open ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, *SD* = .66; see Table 2). They suggest that there is relatively low input in decision making ($\bar{X} = 2.23$, *SD* = .96), but extremely high opportunities for parental involvement ($\bar{X} = 4.28$, *SD* = .87). Teachers in single-focus schools indicate moderate levels of influence in decision making ($\bar{X} = 2.74$, *SD* = .22). Teachers in single-focus public schools have approximately 5 years of teaching experience in their schools ($\bar{X} = 4.60$) and hold, on the average, a BA with 15 credits or an MA degree ($\bar{X} = 3.03$, *SD* = .21).

The canonical analysis for single-focus schools yielded a canonical correlation of .545, indicating that parental involvement and teacher decision making are significantly correlated ($p <. 0001$) in single-focus schools, as presented in Table 3. The parental involvement set was composed of parents' reports of participation in school activities and their perceptions of the opportunities the school provides for parental involvement. Taken as a pair, these variates suggest that a combination of lower levels of parental involvement in school events (–.732) and parent perceptions of fewer opportunities for parental involvement (–.505) correspond with lower levels of teacher influence in decision making (–.668), among teachers with lower levels of education (–.452), but more seniority (.482).

The canonical correlation pair extracts 17% of the variance from parent involvement and 29% of the variance from teacher decision making. The redundancy index indicates that the parent variate accounts for 5% of the variance in the teacher variables, whereas the teacher variate accounts for 9% of the variance in the parent involvement set. Overall, in single-focus schools, low levels of parent involvement seem to be associated with low levels of teacher decision making.

CANONICAL RESULTS FOR MULTIFOCUS SCHOOLS

Parents in multifocus magnet schools report relatively low levels of parent involvement in school activities ($\bar{X} = 2.07$, $SD = .93$), but higher levels of parent involvement in their child's education ($\bar{X} = 2.41$, $SD = 1.11$; see Table 2). Parents suggest that school communication is moderately open ($\bar{X} = 3.29$, $SD = .77$); however, the school infrequently seeks their advice in decision making ($\bar{X} = 1.93$, $SD = .88$) and provides moderate opportunities for parental involvement ($\bar{X} = 3.27$, $SD = .99$). Teachers in multifocus magnet schools have 11 years of teacher experience ($\bar{X} = 10.44$, $SD = 234$) and are most likely to hold BA degrees with 15 credits or MA degrees ($\bar{X} = 3.08$, $SD = 14$). They report low levels of influence in decision making ($\bar{X} = 2.03$, $SD = .15$).

The canonical correlation between the two sets of variables for the multifocus schools is .597, indicating a significant association between parent involvement and teacher decision making ($p < .0001$). The structure coefficients, presented in Table 3, indicate that the parental involvement set is defined by participation in both general school activities and their child's education. In multifocus schools lower levels of teacher influence in decision making (–.944), fewer years of seniority (–.782), and lower levels of education (–.634) correspond with higher levels of parent participation in school activities (.428), but lower levels of participation in child's education (–.729).

The canonical correlation pair extracts 16% of the variance from parent involvement and 63% of the variance from teacher decision making. The redundancy index indicates that the parent variate accounts for 6% of the variance in the teacher variables, whereas the teacher variate accounts for 22% of the variance in the parent involvement set. Thus, in multifocus magnet schools, lower levels of teacher decision making are associated with higher levels of parental participation in school activities, but lower levels of parent involvement in their child's education.

TABLE 4
Summary of the Relationship Between Parent Involvement and Teacher Decision Making Under Three Choice Arrangements

Variable	*Catholic Schools*	*Single-Focus*	*Multifocus Magnet*
Parent involvement			
Participation in school activities	+	–	+
Participation in child's education	–	*	–
Advice in decision making	–	*	*
Home-school communication	*	*	*
Opportunities for involvement	+	–	*
Teacher decision making			
Influence	+	–	–
Seniority	+	+	–
Education	+	–	–

*Below criteria for interpretation (.3).

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

A summary of the results of the canonical correlation analyses is presented in Table 4. The findings suggest that in all three types of schools, levels of parental involvement are related to teacher decision making. However, there are different patterns of relationship between parent involvement and teacher decision making in each of the three types of school choice settings.

In Catholic schools, higher levels of parent involvement at school both in supportive roles through participation in school activities and parents' perceptions that the school provides adequate opportunities for parent involvement are related to higher levels of teacher influence in decision making. However, in these schools lower levels of parent input in school decision making and lower levels of parental involvement in educational areas are also associated with higher levels of teacher influence on school decisions.

Analyses of parent and teacher interviews from these same schools, currently undertaken in a related project, reveal that although Catholic school parents have great respect for the authority of the teachers, they also perceive teachers as "approachable" and "caring." Teachers in these schools, in turn, view their relationships with parents as "familiar" and "friendly." Given the greater autonomy perceived by teachers in Catholic schools and the long tradition of parental choice, it is likely that Catholic schools, more than single-focus and multifocus public schools, could approximate a partnership model of parent-teacher relations or, at least, provide the conditions under which such a mode could develop. In this mode as the data suggest, parents are involved, but not at the expense of teacher decision making. It should be noted, however, that lower levels of parental input in decision making and lower levels of parental participation in their child's educational issues are associated with higher levels of teacher influence in decision making in Catholic schools, suggesting that full partnerships are not reached as teachers appear to contribute the greater influence in decision making.

In contrast, in single-focus schools, although parents report many opportunities for parental involvement, lower levels of parental participation in the school are associated with lower levels of teacher influence in decision making. Site-visit observations and interviews revealed the political and financial vulnerability of the single-focus public schools in this study. All the single-focus public schools were established within a 6-year period prior to the study, were highly dependent on perceptions of public support for their continuation, and were financially dependent on district and state mandates as to whether funding would be available from year to year. In their districts, these schools tended to be treated as experimental and were exempt from some bureaucratic rules, thus increasing their vulnerability. More than Catholic or multifocus schools, these conditions suggest that neither parents nor teachers are entering into partnerships as these schools struggle for survival in a turbulent environment, even though they solicit parents' help in this struggle.

Finally, in multifocus magnet schools, higher levels of parent participation in school activities are associated with lower levels of teacher decision making; however, lower levels of parent participation in their child's education are also associated with lower levels of teacher decision making, indicating that teachers may not encourage nor provide ways in which parents can be involved in homework or other academic areas of their children's lives. In these schools it seems that parents, to some degree, have the upper hand. Given the complexity and the turbulence of these larger, inner-city magnet schools, it seems that there is not much evidence of a partnership mode.

DISCUSSION

In summarizing the findings for each school type, Catholic schools appear to be developing a *partnership mode* of parent-teacher relations more than single-focus or multifocus public schools. Historically, Catholic schools have worked collaboratively with parents emphasizing the role that parents play in the education of their children. Parents are viewed as the primary educators of their children with the schools playing a supporting role. Because of their focused mission, Catholic schools have more clearly defined goals, less bureaucracy, and greater autonomy in their organizational structuring than public schools. These elements, no doubt, contribute to the formation of collaborative relations between home and school (cf. Bryk et al., 1993). However, the results suggest that teachers in Catholic schools may be concerned with parents infringing on their professional discretion because parents do not have much influence over schoolwide decisions. To this extent, they are very much treated as clients, because they appear not to have a significant role in school organization.

The financial and political vulnerability of the single-focus schools may create an atmosphere where the school is open to parents' views and participation to help support the school, but this is not translating into a partnership role with teachers at this time. The single-focus schools in this study were attempting to establish their identities in the community through public relations and outreach programs. They were also involved with parents in lobbying city and state governments for increased budget considerations for their specific schools. This urgency may have distracted teachers and parents alike from the business of student learning and school improvement through the mutual cooperation and decision making of parents and teachers. As a result, the single-focus schools appear to hold on to a *traditional mode* of parent-teacher relations with neither group exercising much authority in school decision making. In the future, they may evolve into a partnership, teacher empowerment, or parent empowerment mode depending on the resolution of their current problems and the emerging principal leadership at these schools. Regarding parent involvement, then, parents are treated more like clients than partners.

Finally, although multifocus magnet schools are most likely to embody vestiges of bureaucratic organization despite their magnet school status, these latter school types are more incumbered in their efforts at parent-teacher relations. This may be due, in part, to their larger size, multiple school goals, and the diversity of their student bodies. Nevertheless, parents were beginning to play a larger role in these schools, almost in reaction to the tight hold parents perceived teachers had over the curriculum and other matters over the years. As local school councils were developing in Chicago at the time of this study, teachers were being denied seats on them.[3] In the Washington, DC area magnet schools, parents were playing a more prominent role in school decisions through councils, committees, and fund-raising efforts than they had played previously, according to administrators' reports. This was attributed to parents' interest in helping the schools improve and lessening the negative image that often portrays these large, urban, public high schools.[4] These magnet schools are suggestive of transitioning from a traditional mode to a *parent empowerment mode*. School officials wanted parents to be involved in the school, but parents wanted to be more involved than they were currently allowed.[5] Their role in school decisions was more that of disgruntled consumers who were making their voices heard for the purpose of school improvement (cf. Hirshman, 1970). Depending on the schools' response to these parents, a partnership mode could develop as understanding and trust develop between the school and these activist parents.

CONCLUSION

From a research perspective, our findings show that there is a relationship between parent and teacher empowerment that is different for different types of schools. In some cases, where teacher decision making is high, parent involvement is low and vice versa. Both are suggestive of a consumerism relationship between parents and schools whereby teachers act as experts and parents have little involvement or where parents make demands on the school. A more carefully controlled design than we were able to use could determine the possible causal factors that might be attributed to this relationship.

From a practical perspective, this study cautions us to consider how the improvement of parent involvement could be threatening to teachers who may not wish to include parents' opinions and ideas in their decisions and how increased teacher decision making could mitigate the influence of parents in school matters. This could compromise our efforts to build strong partnerships between the home and school. We speculate that the dynamics of shared power between parents and teachers in school and education matters is a largely misunderstood and undervalued concept that needs further exploration if new public school choice options, such as charter schools, are to be successful.

Our data suggest that in establishing new forms of public school choice options such as magnet and charter schools where parents are expected to be involved, schools need to develop an openness and responsiveness to parents, as is found traditionally in Catholic schools. Future studies should include an analysis of these new forms of public choice schools.

This study raises a practical question associated with school choice and other types of improvement plans that involve parents and teachers in school governance matters: Can parents and teachers work together effectively in a balanced power relationship? Where decision making has been largely relegated to administrators, can we increase both parent and teacher involvement in decision making at the same time? The answer lies in the willingness of teachers and parents to know and understand their own and each other's expanding role in educational and school governance matters. Teachers may need to function in new roles that substantially depart from their familiar role of knowledge expert within a self-contained classroom, teaching many students simultaneously in a large group. Consequently, parents may need to become more knowledgeable about schools and how they are organized in order to interact effectively with teachers. Furthermore, parents and teachers need to trust one another. Organizationally, schools need to develop a culture of collaboration, caring, and community that will support its members to meet high expectations and build collective meaning and commitment to the community itself (Newmann & Oliver, 1967; Noddings, 1984).

Such efforts have been attributed primarily to Catholic schools as suggested by this study, but they are also possible in public schools, primarily in schools of choice (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). When such conditions develop in all schools, we believe strong teacher and parent involvement in schoolwide decision making can coexist. However, some fundamental shifts in thinking may be necessary before a century and a half of authoritarian and bureaucratic public school control can be replaced by an inclusiveness of decision making that empowers all its members (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1991; Etzioni, 1988).

APPENDIX

Intercorrelations for Variables in the Analysis

	(1) Parent Advice in Decision Making	(2) Participation in School Activities	(3) Participation in Child's Education	(4) Communication	(5) Opportunities for Involvement	(6) Teacher Influence in Decision Making	(7) Seniority	(8) Teacher Education
Catholic schools								
1	1.0000							
2	.2671*	1.0000						
3	.3157*	.3473*	1.0000					
4	.2165*	.1464*	−.0499	1.0000				
5	.2760*	.2575*	−.0328	.4000*	1.0000			
6	−.1529*	.2595*	−.2111*	.0189	.2289*	1.0000		
7	.0945	.3032*	−.0851	.2089*	.1741*	.4762*	1.0000	
8	−.3148*	−.1102	−.0974	−.1794*	−.0098	.2093*	−.6359*	1.0000
Single–focus public schools								
1	1.0000							
2	.3571*	1.0000						
3	.2660*	.3944*	1.0000					
4	.3263*	.1477	.0577	1.0000				
5	.2006	.1894	.0112	.3873*	1.0000			
6	−.1704	.2779*	−.0026	−.1547	.0572	1.0000		
7	.2283	−.2102	−.0569	.1917	.0430	−.8710*	1.0000	
8	.1409	.1654	−.0786	.2924*	.2892*	−.3523*	.4969*	1.0000
Multifocus public schools								
1	1.0000							
2	.1622*	1.0000						
3	.2289*	.2445*	1.0000					
4	.2121*	.0719	−.0437	1.0000				
5	.2691*	.0648	.0298	.3332*	1.0000			
6	.1970*	−.2516*	.3951*	.0776	−.0212	1.0000		
7	.0946	−.1380*	.3882*	.0908	.0176	.6730*	1.0000	
8	.0642	−.0854	.3359*	.0824	.0237	.5116*	.9778*	1.0000

*$p < .01$.

NOTES

1. Adding parents from nonchoice schools would vastly improve the impact of this study. However, such data were not available for this project. This project focuses exclusively on differences among Catholic and public schools of choice.

2. The coding for this latter analysis was as follows: 1 = *less than BA or BS*; 2 = *BA or BS*; 3 = *BA or BS + 15 credits*; 4 = *MA or MS*; 5 = *MA or MS + 30 credits*; 6 = *educational specialist*, 7 = *doctorate*.

3. At one of the magnet schools in this study, the first act of the newly elected Local School Council (LSC) was the decision not to renew the contract of the principal. The teachers sided with the principal in this controversy, whereas parents sided with the LSC. Teachers appeared to be loosing power, and parents were in the process of gaining it.

4. When the Reagan administration was looking for an outstanding urban school to exemplify in the media, one of the schools in this study was so chosen and received a visit from President Reagan.

5. This was evident in the parent interviews we conducted at these magnet schools. For example, parents were frustrated that a teacher about whom they had complained was removed from the classroom but not from the school, and that no replacement teacher had been hired.

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL CHOICE

Exit and Voice in Public Schools

RODNEY T. OGAWA
JO SARGENT DUTTON
University of California, Riverside

This study applies Hirschman's concepts of satisfaction, voice, and valuing product quality to study parents' attitudes toward three forms of school choice: intradistrict options, interdistrict transfers, and public/private school vouchers. Findings reveal three different patterns: Parents who are more likely to participate in intradistrict options have more opportunities to express voice and invest more in educational quality. Parents who are more likely to use vouchers also have more opportunities to exercise voice and invest in educational quality, but they are also less satisfied. And parents who are more likely to seek interdistrict transfers are simply less satisfied with their children's schools.

The debate over parental choice in education continues as policy makers at all levels of government consider and adopt market-oriented approaches to educational reform. These approaches include intradistrict options, such as magnet schools, interdistrict transfers, and vouchers (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994; Witte, 1990). In the midst of this debate, stakeholders in America's public education system are seeking answers to many questions, a prominent one

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being the following: What types of parents will respond favorably to various forms of educational choice?

Policy makers are interested in the answer to this question because of the criticism that, under certain forms of choice, some schools will attract the brightest students, most supportive parents, and best teachers, leaving other schools to languish in mediocrity or worse (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992; Moore & Davenport, 1990). Public educators are interested because they are concerned about the potential damage that a particular form of choice, vouchers, might inflict on public school enrollments and because they seek responses, including intradistrict options, that will stem the potential exodus.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One way to frame the question of which parents will respond favorably to different types of opportunities is to view parents as clients of public education and apply Hirschman's (1970) explication of exit, voice, and loyalty. Hirschman identifies two basic mechanisms for rejuvenating organizations: exit and voice.

Exit occurs when clients become dissatisfied with the quality of an organization's product or service and seek it elsewhere. When the organization recognizes that clients are exiting, it will improve the quality of its product and thereby regain clients.

Voice occurs when dissatisfied clients register their complaints with the organization. When the organization recognizes the substance of the complaints, it improves the quality of its product and, thus, retains and even regains its clients. Clients tend to employ voice when exit is not an available strategy, for instance, in a monopolistic situation. When alternatives do become available, dissatisfied clients are more likely to exit than to voice.

The balance between exit and voice is mediated by loyalty. Clients loyal to an organization are likely to opt for voice, even when exit is available. However, when organizations do not respond to dissatisfied clients, those clients who most value product quality, and thus are most willing to invest their resources in acquiring high quality, are the earliest to exit.

Applying Hirschman's (1970) reasoning to educational choice, parents would be more likely to seek alternatives—that is, participate in choice programs—if they are dissatisfied with their child's present school. However, if parents are loyal and thus voice their dissatisfaction to the schools, they may be less likely to seek options through a choice program. However, if schools are slow to respond to parents' dissatisfaction, then those parents who most value the quality of their child's education will be the first to exit—that is, to opt for involvement in choice programs.

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Research provides limited evidence, most of which is indirect, on the relationship between parents' choice behavior and three factors identified by Hirschman's (1970) model of client-organization relations: parents' satisfaction with their children's schools, the value that parents place on educational quality, and the degree to which parents express voice. In addition, there is fairly clear and consistent evidence that better-educated parents are more likely to actively choose their children's schools.

SATISFACTION

Several studies demonstrate that parents who are dissatisfied with their children's schools are indeed more likely to select another school. The findings of first- and second-year evaluations of Milwaukee Public Schools' Parental Choice Program, which enables low-income families to send their children to private schools at district expense, indicate that choice parents tended to be less satisfied with their children's previous schools than non-choice parents (Witte, 1991; Witte, Bailey, & Thorn, 1992). Similarly, surveys conducted in Minnesota (Darling-Hammond & Kirby, 1985) and Montgomery County (Frechtling & Frankel, 1982) revealed that parents who were "active school choosers" were more likely to be dissatisfied with their children's schools.

EDUCATION LEVEL

Even more conclusive evidence indicates that better educated parents are more likely to choose their children's schools. Studies of the voucher demonstration project in Alum Rock, California, revealed that better educated parents were more likely to take advantage of the voucher and actively engage in choosing schools (Bridge & Blackman, 1978). The evaluations of Milwaukee's limited choice program found that parents, especially mothers, who participated in the program were better educated on average than parents who did not participate (Witte, 1991; Witte et al.,.1992).

Several surveys also reveal that better-educated parents are more likely to choose their children's schools. These surveys tap widely differing samples: parents who sent their children to 75 independent neighborhood schools serving mostly African American families (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987); parents in Minnesota, a state that allows parents to deduct a portion of the cost of sending their children to private schools (Darling-Hammond & Kirby, 1985); parents in Montgomery County (Maryland) who transferred their children, either from public schools to private schools or vice versa, during the 1980 through 1981 academic year (Frechtling & Frankel, 1982); and a national sample of parents questioned to determine how they chose schools and how a federal tuition tax credit might affect their choices (Williams, Hancher, & Hutner, 1983). In every case, better educated parents were more likely to participate in choice programs or otherwise select their children's schools.

Two studies help to explain this pattern. The study of Alum Rock's experimental voucher program (Bridge & Blackman, 1978) and a case study of a public school-choice plan in an unidentified city (Nault & Uchitelle, 1982) revealed that better educated parents had access to more information about schools and about the choice programs than did their less educated counterparts. It makes sense that those parents who are more aware of options and have more information on which to base their selection are more likely to engage in educational choice.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT QUALITY

Research has not examined the investment that parents make in supporting their children's education and thus has not shed direct light on the relationship between the value that parents place on the quality of their children's education and their choice behavior. However, research on the impact of school and district characteristics on parents' attitudes toward choice and their selection of schools provides indirect evidence, suggesting that parents who emphasize the quality of their children's education are more likely to choose their children's schools.

A study conducted in the Detroit area reveals that parents whose children attended lower quality schools had more positive attitudes toward choice (Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1994). However, parents' attitudes toward choice were affected by the resource base of school districts, above and beyond parents' assessment of the quality of schools. Similarly, a study of the effect of open enrollment in Massachusetts indicated that parents generally transferred their children to schools in districts with higher per-pupil expenditures, higher student achievement, and higher median incomes (Fossey, 1994). These results suggest that parents who consciously select their children's schools are attracted to the quality of schools and districts as reflected in academic performance and resource base.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT: AN INDICATOR OF VOICE

Neither does research directly explore the relationship between parent voice and choice behavior. However, again, indirect evidence does exist. Findings from research on the link between parent involvement in school and participation in choice programs are suggestive, but mixed.

Research has only begun to examine the relationship between parents' choice behavior and their involvement in educational activities (Bauch & Goldring, 1995). Early studies focused on parents who had already made educational choices and, thus, tended to emphasize the effect of choice on parental involvement

(Bryk, Lee, & Smith, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1990). A study of Catholic, single-focus, and multifocus magnet schools in three cities revealed that parents who chose Catholic and single-focus schools reported being more involved in school and education-related activities than parents who chose multifocus schools (Bauch & Goldring, 1995). A study of schools of choice in Israel found relatively low levels of "actual parental involvement in school activities" (Goldring & Shapira, 1993, p. 404).

Two studies do provide evidence regarding the relationship between parents' prior involvement in schools and their subsequent choice behavior. A study conducted in St. Louis revealed that parents who did not choose to send their children to suburban schools were more alienated from their children's schools than parents who made active choices (Wells, 1993). The evaluations of Milwaukee's limited choice program for low-income families found that choice parents were more frequently involved in school activities than comparable nonchoice parents (Witte, 1991; Witte et al., 1992). However, the initial evaluation showed that choice parents were also more frequently involved in activities at their children's previous schools, suggesting that the act of choosing a school may simply be another manifestation of parents' active participation in their children's education (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994).

Thus, the limited available evidence is mixed. On one hand, the St. Louis data suggest, in keeping with Hirschman's (1970) model, that more alienated parents, who are less likely to express voice in school matters, are also less likely to make active choices among schools. On the other, the Milwaukee study indicates that parents who are more involved in school activities and likely to have more opportunities to express their concerns are also more likely to take advantage of choice opportunities.

STUDY PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study is exploratory. It represents an initial effort to apply elements of Hirschman's (1970) conceptualization of client behavior and organizational renewal to the study of parents' attitudes toward three types of school choice: intradistrict options, interdistrict transfers, and public-private school vouchers. Guided by Hirschman's framework, this study sought to address the following questions:

1. To what extent are levels of (a) parent satisfaction, (b) parent voice, and (c) parent investment in educational quality associated with the likelihood that parents will participate in the following types of school choice programs: intradistrict options, interdistrict transfers, and public/private school vouchers?
2. Are the same patterns of (a) parent satisfaction, (b) parent voice, and (c) parent investment in educational quality associated with the likelihood that parents will participate in the following types of school choice programs: intradistrict options, interdistrict transfers, and public/private vouchers?

The present study does not include a fourth element of Hirschman's (1970) model: client loyalty. We did not include this variable because parents do not have reliable options, other than private schools, in the districts in which the study was conducted. Thus, in the absence of vouchers, these public school districts operate as quasi-monopolies. As Hirschman explains, loyalty is not a telling factor in monopolistic situations because clients, in the absence of options that provide opportunities to exit, can realistically rely only on voicing their concerns over product quality.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In November 1993, California voters rejected a ballot initiative proposing that the state issue vouchers to parents who withdrew their children from public schools and enrolled them in private schools. The heated campaign that was waged over the initiative energized an active public debate on the issue of parent choice in education. In the wake of the election, the school districts and county offices of education of the California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC) commissioned the survey on which the present study is based.

Although the voucher initiative was defeated, California provides two types of parental choice within the state's public education system. First, the state has enacted an open enrollment policy that allows parents to transfer their children to schools in districts other than the ones in which they reside. Second, legislation has been enacted sanctioning the establishment of 100 charter schools. Under this legislation, school districts and county offices can grant charters to schools, which otherwise can be relieved of much of the state's web of regulations.

In addition to the open enrollment policy and limited charter provisions, many school districts in California have developed a variety of intradistrict options from which parents can select, including magnet schools and schools-within-schools. In spite of the available options, a very small proportion of parents statewide have exercised their right to choose schools for their children.

Five member districts of the CERC volunteered to participate in this study. The five districts are located in an inland section of Southern California, bordering on three large metropolitan areas: Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange County. Two of the participating districts are unified districts, one is an elementary district, and two are high school districts. The districts range in enrollment from 4,100 in the smallest high school district to 7,675 in the elementary district and 32,255 in the largest unified district. All of the districts are ethnically diverse, with increasing numbers of Latino and Asian students and long-standing White and smaller African American populations. Four of the districts have substantial numbers of low-income families. The remaining unified district has a reputation as a highly stable, middle-class community, although even there, the number of low-income families is rising.

None of the five districts in the study had developed intradistrict choice programs in the form of magnet schools, schools-within-schools, and the like. Nor had any of these districts granted a charter under the state's provisions for charter schools.

DATA AND METHODS

This study is part of a larger ongoing study of parent attitudes toward educational choice. The project is sponsored by CERC. The cooperative includes the following members: Riverside and San Bernardino County offices of education, 17 school districts, and the

School of Education of the University of California, Riverside. Five districts volunteered to participate in this study.

SAMPLE

The parents of about 10% of the students in each of the five school districts were surveyed. The following procedures were employed to generate the sample. Although the individual parent was the unit of analysis, classrooms were used as the sampling unit, to facilitate the distribution of surveys. About 10% of the classrooms in elementary schools and 10% of English sections in secondary schools were randomly selected. English sections were used in the secondary schools because all students are required to take an English class.

Each participating school district distributed surveys to the teachers whose classes were included in the sample. The teachers then distributed surveys to their students, who delivered the surveys to a parent. Parents completed surveys and returned them to the school in sealed envelopes. The schools forwarded surveys to the district offices, who sent the unopened envelopes to CERC's research office.

Across the five districts, surveys were sent to 6,734 households. Of that number, 2,561 surveys were completed and returned, for an overall return rate of 38%. However, many parents did not respond to all items. For the purposes of this study, the sample included only those parents who completed all relevant items on the survey. This yielded an actual sample of 1,832 parents, or 27% of the parents to whom surveys were initially sent. A comparison of parents included in the sample with parents who did not complete all relevant items indicated that the two groups responded similarly to items included in the present study. No statistically significant differences existed in the mean scores of the two groups on those items.

INSTRUMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT

The data for this study were drawn from a larger survey of parents' attitudes toward educational choice. The items used in the present study concerned the following topics: parents' education and income; parents' satisfaction with their children's schools; the likelihood that parents would participate in intradistrict, interdistrict, and public/private voucher choice programs; the frequency with which parents participate in activities at school; and the frequency with which parents engage in education-related activities at home. Items took the form of 4-point Likert-type scales.

The questionnaire was piloted on about 100 parents in schools not included in the study. Based on the feedback received from parents, the researchers made adjustments in the questionnaire. The survey was translated into Spanish and made available where necessary by teachers whose classes were included in the sample.

Dependent variables. This study included three dependent variables: (a) the likelihood that parents would participate in programs offering intradistrict options, (b) the likelihood that parents would participate in interdistrict transfer programs, and (c) the likelihood that parents would use a voucher to send their child to a private school. Each variable was measured by a single survey item. Each item asked parents how likely they would be to participate in one of the three types of choice programs and provided four responses: *very unlikely*, *unlikely*, *likely*, and *very likely*.

Independent variables. Three independent variables were the primary focus of this study: parent satisfaction with their child's school, parent voice, and parent investment in educational quality. To determine their level of satisfaction, parents were asked to assign a letter grade, ranging from D to A, to their children's school and to their school district.

To assess the level of parent voice, we employed a proxy measure: the frequency with which parents were involved in school activities. We reasoned that the frequency with which parents talked to their child's teacher, visited their child's class, or engaged in other activities on the school site provided at least an indication of the opportunity to express voice. We acknowledge that this particular measure of voice has limitations, recognizing that other, perhaps more salient behaviors, such as participating on site governance councils, are untapped. However, within the constraints of the items included in the general survey, the following types of activities promised at least to indicate the opportunity that parents had to express their voice about school affairs. To determine the level of their involvement in school activities, parents were asked the frequency with which they participated in the following school-based activities: meetings and other events, visiting their child's classroom, talking to their child's teacher, and volunteering. Parents selected from the following responses: *never*, *once a year*, *two to three times a year*, and *more than three times a year*.

To gauge the level of parent investment in educational quality, we also employed a proxy measure: the frequency with which parents were involved in educational activities at home. Here we reasoned that the frequency with which parents invested their private time in their child's education reflected, to some extent, the value that they placed on the quality of that education. Again, we recognize that this measure suffers from limitations because it does not directly tap the extent to which parents value quality education. It does, however, provide an indirect indicator within the constraints of the items included in the survey on which this study is based. To determine their level of involvement, parents were asked the frequency with which they engaged in the following activities: check on the completion of homework, help with homework, talk about school, and emphasize the importance of school. Parents selected from the following responses: *never*, *once a week*, *two to three times a week*, and *more than three times a week*.

Principal component analysis was conducted on the 12 items of satisfaction, frequency of school involvement, and frequency of involvement in educational activities at home. Using eigenvalues of greater than one as the criterion for the number of components, three components were identified. The results of the rotated (varimax) component analysis indicate that the three theoretical dimensions are largely appropriate (see Table 1). The four items dealing with school activities loaded heavily on Component 1, school involvement. The four items concerning educational activities at home loaded most heavily on Component 2, home involvement. The items in which parents graded their child's school and the district both loaded on Component 3, parent satisfaction.

TABLE 1
Rotated Component Loadings

	Components			
Item	*Component 1 (voice)*	*Component 2 (educational investment)*	*Component 3 (satisfaction)*	*Component 4 (socioeconomic status)*
1. Attend events	.74			
2. Talk to teacher	.80			
3. Volunteer	.82			
4. Visit class	.84			
5. Help with homework		.68		
6. Check homework		.75		
7. Talk about school		.80		
8. Emphasize importance of school		.83		
9. School grade			.87	
10. District grade			.90	
11. Parent education				.77
12. Family income				.83
Eigenvalue	4.13	1.62	1.49	1.25
Percentage of variance	34.4	13.5	12.5	10.4

NOTE: Only loadings greater than .4 are shown.

The principal component analysis generated component scores that were employed as measures of the three independent variables: parent satisfaction, school involvement, and home involvement. This procedure offers the advantage of deriving independent variables that are uncorrelated and avoids problems in conducting regression analyses arising from multicollinearity.

Socioeconomic status variable. As noted earlier, previous research demonstrates that certain characteristics of parents, including educational attainment, are predictive of parents' choice behavior. Thus, in the present study, we included survey items regarding level of parents' education and annual household income. The results of a rotated (varimax) component analysis revealed that these two measures loaded most heavily on Component 4, parent socioeconomic status (see Table 1). Scores on this were employed as the measure of parent socioeconomic status.

PROCEDURES

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship of parent satisfaction, parent voice, and parent investment in educational quality to the likelihood of participating in intradistrict, interdistrict, and public/private voucher programs. We completed three separate analyses, one for each of the three dependent variables or types of choice programs.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS

Variable means and standard deviations for the 1,832 parent respondents and simple bivariate correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2. Because component scores were used as measures of the independent variables and the control variable, the means and standard deviations for these variables are 0.00 and 1.00, respectively. With regard to the dependent variables, one observation merits attention. Recall that the scale on which parents responded with regard to the likelihood that they would participate in each type of choice included the following: *very unlikely*, *unlikely*, *likely*, and *very likely*. The mean values for the dependent variables reveal that two types of choice are generally appealing to parents. Parents tended to report that they would be likely to use a voucher (2.99) and between *likely* and *very likely* to engage in intradistrict choice (3.34).

Because component scores were used as measures of independent and control variables, these variables are not correlated (.00). In addition, the correlations between each independent and control variable and each dependent variable is equivalent to the standardized regression coefficient, or Beta.

TABLE 2
Bivariate Correlations of Study Variables

Variable	*Mean*	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Voice	0.00	1.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.20	−.04	.06
2. Educational investment	0.00	1.00		1.00	.00	.00	.16	.02	.09
3. Satisfaction	0.00	1.00			1.00	.00	−.02	−.25	−.17
4. Socioeconomic status	0.00	1.00				1.00	.12	−.06	.01
5. Intradistrict options	3.36	.76					1.00	.15	.21
6. Interdistrict options	2.59	.92						1.00	.33
7. Voucher	2.99	.95							1.00

NOTE: Correlations ≥ .05 are significant at the .01 level.

ANSWERING THE STUDY QUESTIONS

In reporting the overall results, we return to the two major questions that guided this study. The general answer to the first question is that it depends on the type of choice program, foreshadowing the answer to the second question.

Intradistrict choice. Regression analysis revealed that two of the three independent variables and the control variable were significantly associated with the likelihood that parents would participate in intradistrict choice programs (see Table 3). Parental satisfaction with the child's current school was not associated significantly with the dependent variable. However, parent voice (Beta = .20), as measured by the frequency with which they participated in school activities; parent investment in educational quality (Beta = .16), as measured by the frequency with which parents engage in educational activities at home; and parents' socioeconomic status (Beta = .12) were positively associated with intradistrict choice. Together, these four variables account for just 8% ($R^2 = .08$) of the variance in the dependent variable.

Interdistrict transfer. Quite a different picture emerges regarding the likelihood that parents will opt for interdistrict transfers (see Table 3). Parents' satisfaction with their child's current school (Beta = −.25) and parent socioeconomic status (Beta = −.06) were negatively associated with the likelihood that parents would use an

TABLE 3
Beta Weights for Likelihood of Parents Participating in Intradistrict, Interdistrict, and Voucher Choice Programs

	Dependent Variables		
Predictors	*Intradistrict Programs*	*Interdistrict Programs*	*Voucher Choice Programs*
Parent voice	.20	−.04	.06
Educational investment	.16	.02	.09
Satisfaction	−.02	−.25	−.17
Parent socioeconomic status	.12	−.06	.01
R Square	.08	.07	.04
SE	.02	.02	.02

NOTE: Betas ≥ .05 significant at .01 level.

interdistrict transfer. Neither parental voice nor the level of parents' investment in educational quality were associated with likelihood of participating in interdistrict programs. These variables accounted for just 7% (R^2 = .07) of the variance in the dependent variable.

Public/private voucher. Something of an in-between picture emerges in the case of public/private school vouchers (see Table 3). Both parent voice (Beta = .06) and parent investment in educational quality (Beta = .09) were positively associated with the likelihood that parents would use a voucher to send their children to private schools. Parents' level of satisfaction with their child's school (Beta = −.17) was found to be negatively associated with likelihood of using a voucher. Socioeconomic status was not found to be a significant predictor of voucher use. Just 4% (R^2 = .04) of the variance in likelihood of parents using a voucher was accounted for by these variables.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relations between parent involvement in education-related activities and the likelihood of their participation in three general types of educational choice. In this section, we focus our discussion on the overall finding that different patterns of parent satisfaction and involvement explain the likelihood that parents will participate in three types of educational choice.

EXPLAINING PARENT CHOICE BEHAVIOR

Before turning to that discussion, we consider another general result: Parent satisfaction, parent voice, parent investment in educational quality, and parent socioeconomic status, taken together, did not account for large percentages of variance in the likelihood that parents would participate in intradistrict, interdistrict, or voucher choice programs. This clearly suggests that the models were underspecified.

However, our purpose was not to test an overall model of parent choice behavior. Rather, we sought to explore the possibility that parent involvement might not simply be a product of parent choice, as suggested by choice proponents and examined in previous research, but might actually influence parents' attitudes and responses to educational choice. Consequently, we did not include school and district characteristics, two sets of variables that previous research found to be associated with parent responses to choice opportunities (Fossey, 1994; Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1994). The finding that different patterns of satisfaction and parent voice and investment are associated with the likelihood that parents would engage in different types of choice suggests that parent involvement may indeed be associated with how parents respond to different types of choice opportunities.

EXIT AND VOICE

The theoretical framework drawn from Hirschman's (1970) explanation of organizational revitalization and client behavior proved useful in explaining the different patterns in parent satisfaction and involvement across three general types of choice. To review briefly, this study drew on three points from Hirschman's conceptualization. First, when clients are dissatisfied, they seek services elsewhere; they exit. Second, if exit is not viable because of the absence of options, clients express dissatisfaction; they voice concerns. Third, if the organization does not respond to the concerns of clients, those clients who most value the quality of the service seek it elsewhere; they exit. This study did not attend to a fourth element in Hirschman's model: loyalty, which mediates the balance between exit and voice because loyal clients are likely to opt for voice, even where exit is available.

Recall that we made two assumptions linking Hirschman's (1970) theory to parent involvement and educational choice: We treated the involvement of parents in school activities as a reflection of loyalty and as an opportunity to express voice. We treated the involvement of parents in educational activities at home as an indication of their investment in educational quality and, thus, as a measure of the value they place on the quality of their child's education. Given these assumptions, the points derived from Hirschman's theory bear on the results of this study, although not perfectly. Hirschman links satisfaction, voice, and the importance of product quality to exiting in a relatively straightforward set of relations. The relations are clouded by more contingencies when parent choice behavior is the outcome.

Satisfaction. Parents who were less satisfied with their child's school indeed said they were more likely to exit by opting for an interdistrict transfer or by using a voucher to send their child to a private school. However, the case of intradistrict options seems to present an anomaly. The likelihood that parents say they will participate in intradistrict choice programs is not associated with dissatisfaction.

Educational quality. Parents who have more opportunities to exercise voice and who invest more time in their child's education, in that relative order, are more likely to participate in intradistrict choice programs. Parents who make a larger investment and have greater opportunities to express voice, in that order, are more likely to use a voucher. In the case of parents who are more likely to seek an interdistrict transfer, neither voice nor time investment is a factor.

Exit. Different combinations of satisfaction, voice, and investment in educational quality are associated with the likelihood that parents will exit, or participate in three types of educational choice. For parents who are more willing to participate in intradistrict choice programs, satisfaction with their child's current school is not an issue, and the opportunity to give voice to concerns keeps them from venturing too far However, their concern for the quality of their child's education contributes to their willingness to consider options within the confines of the school district in which they reside.

Parents who are more likely to use a voucher have opportunities to express voice but are more concerned with the quality of their child's education. This, coupled with their relative dissatisfaction, contributes to the likelihood that parents will seek options outside their current situation and send their child to a private school.

For parents who are more likely to seek an interdistrict transfer, voice and the willingness to invest in the quality of their child's education are not factors. For them, dissatisfaction with their child's current school contributes to the likelihood that they will seek a way out, one that does not require a substantial personal investment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The findings of this study have implications for two important and related issues surrounding parental choice in education. The first concerns the impact of choice on social stratification in schools. The second involves the use of intradistrict options as a means by which public education can reduce the impact of other types of choice, including public/private school vouchers.

The issue of social stratification in education looms large in debates over the merits of parental choice in education. Proponents claim that choice programs would reduce social stratification by enabling low-income parents to select their children's schools, just as wealthier parents already do (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coons & Sugarman, 1978). However, critics warn that choice programs would worsen social stratification: Higher status parents, even among the poor, would move their children, who are often better students, to better schools, leaving behind schools with higher concentrations of low-achieving students from the poorest backgrounds (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992; Moore & Davenport, 1990). In essence, some schools would be left without the valuable resources that higher status parents contribute to their children's educational lives, whereas other schools would increase their bounty.

The findings of the present study suggest that some forms of choice may even affect the distribution of parental resources that are not directly or entirely associated with social status. In addition to the impact of socioeconomic status, parents who more frequently participate in school activities and engage in educational activities at home were found to be more likely to consider intradistrict options and use a public/private school voucher. Thus, both of these types of choice programs, and intradistrict options in particular, could produce situations where some schools would attract large numbers of potentially loyal parents who value the quality of their children's education, whereas other schools would be left with parents who do little to actively support their children's education. This seems to add further evidence to the contention that choice could heighten rather than reduce social stratification in schools.

In many states, proponents of school choice are intensifying their political pressure. For example, although California voters defeated a voucher proposal in 1993, it appears likely that another voucher initiative will appear on a future ballot. To counter the perceived threat posed by such efforts, many public school administrators and members of boards of education are adopting limited choice programs. They reason that if public education provides options, parents will be less likely to find other alternatives, including private schools, appealing. This strategy seems to assume that parents will respond similarly to different choice options. The results of the present study do not support that assumption.

We found that different patterns of satisfaction, parent voice, and parent investment in educational quality predicted parents' responses to different types of choice programs. Of particular interest here is the difference in parents' reactions to intradistrict options and public/private school vouchers. As we have reported, parents who said they were more likely to seek intradistrict options and parents who said they were more likely to use a voucher were also more likely to have opportunities to express voice and invest time in the quality of their children's education. However, whereas satisfaction with their child's present school was not a significant factor for parents drawn to intradistrict choice, parents who were less satisfied were more likely to be attracted to vouchers.

Thus, if public school systems are intent on retaining the children of parents who find vouchers an appealing alternative, simply offering intradistrict options is probably not sufficient. Those options must address the concerns that contribute to the parents' dissatisfaction. Of some comfort to public educators should be the finding that parents who are more likely to use a voucher are also somewhat more likely to be involved in school activities. Thus, many of these parents are open to communication from schools and district offices. This, it would seem, provides opportunities to learn what changes and types of programs would be appealing to these parents and to inform them about options that are available in the school and district.

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SES AND DEMOGRAPHIC PREDICTORS OF MAGNET SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

DOUG ARCHBALD
University of Delaware

While there is a sizable body of survey research on parental attitudes concerning school choice, research is needed documenting enrollment distributions in systems with school choice policies. An important equity concern has to do with possible stratifying effects related to class, race, or geographic factors affecting parent choices. This study presents an analysis of relationships between enrollment in elementary-magnet schools and selected socioeconomic, racial, and geographic variables in a big city school system. Variables related to parent socioeconomic status (SES) and proximity to magnet schools were found to be significant predictors of magnet enrollment.

Interest in school choice grew steadily during the 80s; by 1989 school choice was America's hottest education-reform wave (Snider, 1989). That parents should be able to choose schools, that the education system should provide more educational options, and that schools should be accountable through market forces are ideas that appeal to many reformers and education leaders (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Kolderie & Olson, 1986; Lieberman, 1986; "Making kids smarter...", May 27, 1992; Nathan, 1989; Raywid, 1989)—particularly since other reform initiatives spawned during the 80s have borne meager fruit. Intra and interdistrict open enrollment and magnet schools are the most common form of school choice,[1] and their growing popularity has stimulated more interest in public/private tuition vouchers and charter schools (Olson, 1992). A voucher policy was recently implemented in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and voucher bills have been deliberated in several states and cities, including Washington, DC.

School choice policies raise a number of equity issues. One important issue related to academic stratification arises from the shift from centralized to decentralized student assignment (Lee, 1993; Wells, 1991). Centralized student assignment systems, the tradition in public education in our country, assign students to schools based on school attendance area zones. Whether a neighborhood schools system is used or one of the many student assignment methods used in desegregation programs (e.g., rezoning, school clustering, school pairing), each student is assigned a school based exclusively on residence. Under the decentralized conditions of school choice, attendance area zones are less significant. Where each child goes to school is determined by family decisions. Under conditions of school choice the role of the central office in student assignment changes to information dissemination, managing applications, and enrollment regulation.

The two models (centralized, nonchoice vs. decentralized, choice) are based on different assumptions about equity. In the centralized model, the "common schools" idea prevails—all schools are the same. They have the same curriculum, levels of funding, teacher-pupil ratios, and certified staff. Sameness produces equity. There is no need for parent choice because each school offers the same thing, and because all students are assumed to have generally the same needs, interests, and learning goals. In the decentralized model, choice is viewed as necessary because student needs and interests, and the goals parents have for their children are viewed as more diverse. It is assumed schools can be differentiated without being inequitable, and indeed that alternative approaches are desirable. Schools can specialize in particular ways: curriculum programs, educational philosophies, technologies, teaching methods, organizational structures, etc.. Schools can be designed to accommodate parent work schedules, day care needs, or other types of needs. In the school choice model, sameness is the problem, not the solution.

The parent choice model of equity also makes assumptions about information and decision making (Hanson, 1992). It assumes parents are aware and

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[1] For figures on the prevalence of different approaches to school choice see Bierlein (1993) or Steel and Levine (1994).

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informed of alternatives (i.e., educational options) and make choices based on reasonably well defined preferences. While proponents of choice do not claim parents will choose with perfect information and awareness of alternatives, it is assumed most parents will make reasonably informed choices and that existing regulations can equalize resources to schools and prevent racial segregation of schools. The difference will be that parents will have choices and schools will no longer be guaranteed a captive clientele.

The above model neglects to account for students being resources for other students. It views parents as clients or customers and schools as businesses, solely responsible for their own quality. However, the quality of a school is in part shaped by the characteristics of its students. For each student, his or her classmates' academic abilities and behavior contribute to the quality of the classroom environment. Since all students are not equally academically able and motivated, and the supply of the most able and motivated students is limited, where they go to school determines the distribution of an important educational resource. If the most able and motivated students choose the same schools, it is arguable that, while they benefit, the other schools and students are bereft of an important resource for learning.

Critics of school choice contend this segregation of able and less able students occurs when choice operates. "[M]agnet schools may serve their functions of providing some degree of voluntary integration and of keeping middle class students in the urban system; however, the price is obviously a dual school system" (Witte & Walsh, 1990, p. 205). Though the phenomenon is not well documented, it has been labeled "skimming" or "creaming" (as in the cream being skimmed off), and is viewed as contributing to inequitable conditions in school systems (Bastian, 1985; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Royster, Baltzell, & Simmons, 1979; Wells & Crain, 1992). Proponents of school choice are less convinced this is a serious problem, and counter that many if not most existing systems without school choice already have extensive segregation of students by ability and income due to residence-based student assignment, and that, indeed, school choice is a means to liberate students from mandatory assignment to schools they might otherwise prefer not to attend (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coons, 1981; Nathan, 1989). This issue has generated much academic debate and many acrimonious legislative battles and does not appear to be reaching resolution.

This article brings empirical data to this issue. It is based on an analysis of enrollment patterns in a system with school choice policies. The focus here is on parent educational attainment and income as predictors of magnet school enrollment. There is reason to believe both variables are likely to be important in explaining magnet school choices, but educational attainment seems particularly important. Sociological theory, particularly in the neo-Weberian tradition suggests that parents who value education, as indicated by their own educational attainment, transmit those values to their children (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Collins, 1979; Kohn, 1969). Sociological research has found strong relationships between parent educational attainment (as measured by degree attainment) and variables like school involvement and student academic achievement and college aspirations (Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Lareau, 1987; Rothman, 1990; Wright & Wright, 1976). Though the precise mechanisms are not easy to document because they occur in the myriad interactions in the home and between parents and teachers, doubtless one feature is greater parental insistence on academic achievement and more active pursuit of academic opportunities for their children.

These parental values have potentially important implications for the distribution of students in systems with school choice. It suggests that more educated parents are likely to be more vigilant about information on educational opportunities in systems with school choice. If this is true, and assuming most parents believe magnets provide a better education, more educated parents will be more likely to enroll their children in magnet schools. Do most parents think magnet schools are likely to furnish a better eduction for their children? This question appears not to have been studied in much depth, but articles in the press about magnets and at least two surveys indicate magnet schools are generally perceived by parents as being high quality schools (Royster et al., 1979; Witte & Backus, 1986).

Effects of parent education on participation in school choice and the related issue of "skimming," while much discussed in literature, have not been thoroughly studied empirically (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Lines, 1993). Most of the studies in this area have relied on surveys. Nault and Uchitelle (1982) found in a study of an open enrollment program in a Minnesota district (no magnets were involved) that parent educational attainment was associated both with the probability that a parent was aware of having a choice and with the probability of investigating school options before enrolling. Another Minnesota survey, this one on its recently enacted statewide open enrollment policy, also found parents with more education were more aware of the various enrollment options (Tenbusch, 1993). These surveys support the proposition of differential access to school choice opportunities based on parent education, but as Lines (1993) points out, disparities in awareness may fade over time as word-of-mouth processes take hold and policies become better known. Her reanalysis of data from the Alum Rock voucher demonstrations (Bridge & Blackman, 1978) shows that after some initial differences documented in early studies, after 14 months into the program parents were "approximately equal in their knowledge about choice program, regardless of ethnicity, income, or education" (p. 1).

While surveys of parents about school choice preferences and information sources are informative (e.g., CFAT, 1992; Fossey, 1994), it is important to study actual enrollments (not just expressed knowledge, attitudes or intentions). Survey responses and behavior can be two different things (Deutscher, 1977): parents may misrepresent their true knowledge or values regarding school alternatives or intervening variables may prevent parents from acting on their knowledge or values. In either case, parent knowledge and values may not predict well enrollment outcomes.

A few studies have investigated enrollment results and their relationship to parent education (Martinez, Thomas, & Kemerer, 1994). Levine (1975) compared the educational attainment of a sample of urban African American mothers of parochial school children in two schools to a group matched on income with children in public schools and found that the parochial school mothers had higher levels of educational attainment. Witte, Bailey, and Thorn (1993), based on a surveyed sample of participants in Milwaukee's voucher program, found 6% of the mother/female guardians reported having a college degree; 45% reported "some college." A comparison group of public school mothers/female guardians (of approximately similar income) enrolled in the public school system showed 3% reported having a college degree and 26% with "some college." The Martinez et al. (1994) review, which also cites the above studies, found choosing parents to be better educated in San Antonio, where the district offers an academically selective foreign language school-within-a-school program. (The authors do not present figures on the difference between choosing and nonchoosing parents in educational attainment.) Two international studies reviewed by Glenn (1993) found that in France, white-collar workers were overrepresented by about 10% (relative to their proportional representation in the schools) among those making school choice transfer requests; but in Scotland, very similar levels of school choice requests were made by parents of all social classes, with modest over-representation of parents who were manual laborers. Surprisingly, none of the major national studies of magnet schools in the United States have investigated empirical links between parent educational levels and propensities for choosing magnets (Blank, Dentler, Baltzell, & Chabotar, 1983; Royster et al., 1979; Steel & Levine, 1994).

The above studies suggest parent education influences the likelihood of participating in school choice. However, as most researchers acknowledge, there are important policy differences among the choice plans studied and the research designs and measures used to study them. And, it is difficult to draw more specific conclusions. It remains difficult to determine the role of socioeconomic status among the many factors that shape the decisions of parents involved in school choice. Bauch & Goldring (1995, p. 3) contend, "A considerable amount of research remains to be conducted." If the literature remains inconclusive, it seems to lean toward the proposition that parent education is likely to be an influential variable shaping school choices and enrollment outcomes.

This study builds on prior research and helps to fill a gap in empirical studies of enrollment patterns under conditions of choice. A significant limitation of previous research has been its bivariate design: enrollment outcomes are correlated with only one other variable. For instance, minority enrollment outcomes or enrollments of children on free-lunch are related to a particular type of student assignment policy or to one socioeconomic predictor variable (e.g., Armor, 1992; Levine & Levine, 1978; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Rossell, 1990).

We need research disentangling the multiple determinants of enrollment outcomes. Multivariate research is needed on the nature and strength of relationships among parent SES characteristics, other predictor variables, and enrollment outcomes under particular, specified conditions of school choice. This paper describes a school choice policy context and presents results from a multivariate regression analysis using district enrollment data and census data. This analysis shows significantly higher levels of enrollment in magnet schools of children from neighborhoods with higher levels of parent educational attainment. However, this analytic approach is new, has certain limitations (discussed below), and is based on a study of one district. It should be refined and replicated to assess its potential to disentangle the various determinants of enrollment outcomes and to yield estimates of effect sizes of these determinants. Such estimates could be highly useful to policy makers and for developing theoretical models explaining "who gets into what school and why."

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Research Questions and Caveats

This study provides figures on enrollment in elementary magnet schools of students from neighborhoods differing in demographic characteristics and proximity to magnet schools. The main purpose of the study was to determine if neighborhoods with higher levels of educational attainment send more kids to magnet schools. Effects of household income, racial, and geographic variables were also investigated. This study used multiple regression analysis, which permits estimation of effects of each of the neighborhood variables net of the effects of the others. This statistical approach is useful because of the naturally confounded state of these sociological, geographic, and demographic predictor variables in city population distributions.

A limitation of this study is related to the unit of analysis. This study examines rates of enrollment in magnet schools from neighborhoods differing in measured demographic and geographic characteristics. This study cannot explain the knowledge and decisions behind differential levels of magnet school enrollment; and while it is reasonable to assume that the observed neighborhood level relationships correspond with individual level processes, this remains an assumption awaiting proof. Proof must await studies examining effects of multiple variables (e.g., socioeconomic, geographic, attitudinal) on individual school choices.[2] Until such studies are conducted, studies using proxies will have to suffice, since the alternative is no information at all.

Also, since the data are from elementary schools, caution should be exercised in generalizing to parental decisions and enrollment outcomes involving older students. Further, that the results are from one approach to school choice (albeit a very common approach) suggests caution in generalizing to other approaches, such as interdistrict open enrollment, controlled choice programs without magnet schools, tuition voucher policies, or private schools. However, the approach used in the system studied here is widely used in urban systems utilizing magnet schools along with other desegregation policies (Steel & Levine, 1994). Magnet schools are now in more than half of urban districts with more than 10,000 students and almost all of these use magnets as part of a desegregation plan (Steel & Levine, 1994). Given the size of districts like Atlanta, Los Angeles, Dallas, St. Louis, Buffalo, Chicago, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and New York City, which are some of the districts with magnet schools, it is clear that policy issues related to magnet schools are policy issues directly affecting vast numbers of students and families across the nation.

Background on the School Choice System

The school district studied here is in a large Midwestern city that has had magnet schools and a majority-to-minority racial balance transfer policy since the 70s. Thirteen out of the district's 102 elementary schools are magnet schools, which can be chosen by students from throughout the city.[3] With one exception (a small, Grades 3-5 gifted and talented school), the magnet schools do not have selective admissions policies. Like most of the district's schools, the magnet schools all operate under racial balance guidelines, so they have matched enrollment targets for both Black and White applicants. Schools that get more applications than seats, use a random selection process; children not getting a seat, have second and third choice schools listed on their application, and the great majority of applicants are eventually accommodated. Students not getting their first choice option, may attend their neighborhood school if desired. A similar enrollment process operates for nonmagnet schools—that is, under the district's "right to attend a racially balance school" policy, all children have the right to apply to a school where children of their race are in the minority. Transportation is provided for all students living beyond walking distance (about a mile, unless busy streets must be crossed).

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[2] It should be noted that the relationship between two neighborhood level variables in this data set, College and Income (Table 1) is .41—a correlation very close to correlations between income and educational attainment using national individual-level data (Jencks & Rainwater, 1979). This adds support to the inference that census tract level relationships are reasonably good approximations of individual level relationships for the kinds of analyses undertaken here.

[3] The magnet schools offered the typical variety of programs that have been described in such works as Levine and Havighurst (1977) and Young and Clinchy (1992).

An extensive information system informs parents of the magnet schools, other educational alternatives, and registration and enrollment policies. Three brochures and two letters are mailed to all households each year. One of the brochures is in a large, colorful tabloid format and describes all the schools, their specialties and locations, and registration procedures. School principals also send home with children mailings about school registration at appropriate times during the year. The district also has a communications program describing school choices and registration processes in radio broadcasts, in the city newspapers, and at community organizations and daycare centers.

Sample and Variables

The unit of analysis is the neighborhood elementary attendance area. This district uses traditional neighborhood-based boundaries to create its attendance areas to determine school assignment. These are referred to as attendance areas.

The school district has 89 attendance areas with an average of about 500 students per attendance area. (The 13 magnet schools are not included because they do not have neighborhood attendance area boundaries.) District data collected in 1985-86 were used to calculate the percent of students from each of the 89 neighborhood attendance areas enrolled in magnet schools. The remainder choose either their neighborhood school or another (nonmagnet) school under the majority-to-minority transfer process.

The dependent variable will be called magnet enrollment. It is the percentage of children from the neighborhood attendance area enrolled in magnet schools. The range on this variable is 42%; a few attendance areas have no children enrolled in magnet schools, and one has 42% of its children in magnet schools. The average across the 89 attendance areas is 10%.

The five independent variables are described and explained next.

College: The percentage of persons over 25 in the attendance area with 4 or more years of college.[4] For the reasons cited above, this is the main variable of interest in this study. This variable was chosen because a college degree is a key socioeconomic measure and a logical variable to investigate the claim that magnets appeal largely to professional parents, and also because school attendance areas vary substantially on this variable. A positive relationship between college and magnet enrollment would suggest magnets are more accessible or attractive to parents with higher educational attainment. The mean and standard deviation on this variable are respectively, 12.9% and 7.7%.

Income: The median income of the attendance area's census tracts. This variable is of interest, for reasons similar to the above, except that income per se is not as direct a measure of parental educational values. At the individual level these two variables correlate only at about .45 in national studies (Jencks & Rainwater, 1979). Clearly, there are many high-wage earners without high educational attainment and vice versa. (The correlation between college and income in this data set is almost identical at .41.) A positive relationship between income and magnet enrollment would suggest magnets are more accessible or attractive to parents with higher incomes.[5] The mean and standard deviation on this variable are respectively, $16,888 and $5,472.

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[4] The measure of education is a mean derived by adding the number of college educated adults in an attendance area's census tracts and dividing by the total number of adults. Attendance areas typically contain several census tracts and so the census tract data were aggregated to the attendance area level. In cases where attendance area and tract boundaries were not contiguous, weighted estimates were made based on the percent of the tract contained within the attendance area, and taking into consideration the population density of the portion of the census tracy being included in the estimate. Large school district and city maps were used for this process as well as my own detailed knowledge of the city from having lived there. This enabled me to know in most instances, down to the street level, the kinds of households, population areas, and topographical features of each of the attendance areas. Census figures were drawn from the U.S. Bureau of Census's population and housing report for the city (U.S. Census, 1983); maps and demographic data from the city's planning and development agency were also used to double-check and confirm the accuracy of the data used for this analysis.

Proximity: The number of magnets within a 2 mile radius of the "sending" attendance area (i.e., the residential attendance area for the student enrolled in that magnet school). This was calculated for each of the 89 attendance areas using a school district map. While magnet schools are dispersed geographically throughout the district's roughly 4 mile by 10 mile boundary, there are more magnets concentrated in the interior portions of the district, and some attendance areas have as many as four magnets nearby while others have none within the measured 2 mile radius. This variable is significant because an increase in the number of nearby magnets increases the accessibility of magnets by presenting more choices and reducing busing distance. This variable also serves as an important control variable for the main variables of interest above. The mean and standard deviation on this variable are respectively, 2.1 and 2.4.

Percentage of Black children in the neighborhood and percentage of Black-school attending the neighborhood school: The first variable is "percentage of neighborhood children who are Black" and the second is "percentage of children in the neighborhood school who are Black." These two independent variables relate to the question of racial variables affecting magnet school choices. Understandably a sensitive issue, these variables merit exploration because of issues of "White flight" that have been important in studies of barriers to school integration. The issue is this: A neighborhood school's perceived quality, and thus a magnet's comparative attractiveness, may be influenced by the percentage of Black students in the home neighborhood school or Black children living in the neighborhood (Sobel & Beck, 1980; Wells, 1991). However, because magnet enrollment is based on all students from a given attendance area (both Black and White) enrolled in magnet schools, effects of either percentage of Black children in the neighborhood or in attending the neighborhood school, if they are found, cannot be interpreted exclusively as White flight. The mean and standard deviation on the percentage of Black children in the school school variable are respectively, 54% and and 16%; and on the percentage of Black children in the neighborhood variable are respectively, 38% and 37%. (Attendance areas range from less than 1% to 99% on this variable; hence, the large standard deviation.)

RESULTS OF THE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 1, shows results of regressing attendance areas' magnet participation (magnet enrollment) on the set of independent variables selected for this analysis. The regression model explains 51% of the variance in magnet enrollment. The standardized partial coefficients show that virtually all of the variation is explained by college (.731, $p<.001$) and proximity (.369, $p=.002$), both of which show a strong, statistically significant, positive association with magnet enrollment, with the college effect being substantially stronger. Although income shows a weak relationship with magnet enrollment, it is a negative relationship, counter to expectations suggested by the "skimming" thesis; however, with a p value of .073, this relationship falls short of the .05 convention for statistical significance. The remaining two variables, percent Black school and percent Black neighborhood, are not close to statistical significance. These relationships are discussed in more detail.

The college variable has a very strong very statistically significant independent effect on magnet enrollment.[6] Every percentage point increase in col-

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[5] Although neighborhoods are not completely homogenous in educational attainment or income, in this city as in many, substantial residential homogeneity occurs not only because of proximity to jobs, geographic factors, and the development of neighborhoods with distinct ethnic and social class identities. The city, for instance, has two regions with unusually high levels of parent educational attainment. One is a cluster of neighborhoods near a large university where many faculty and professionals live (most have advanced degrees); the others are near the city's school district and governmental offices. Census tract data show generally from 40-50% of adult residents of these neighborhoods have four or more years of college. Other regions of the city (many are in the inner city) are as low as 2% on this figure. There are also regions in the city with predominantly blue-collar workers, with educational attainment ranges around 10-35%, but with close to middle-class incomes. Other neighborhoods near the city's newer commercial areas are populated heavily with middle-income corporate workers (e.g., sales, middle management), who typically college degrees. While obviously all neighborhoods have mixtures of people, the elementary attendance zone unit of analysis is sufficiently small and the variation between neighborhoods on these variables is sufficiently large that it is reasonable to assume differential magnet attendance is related to SES characteristics of individuals.

[6] Note the "suppressor effect", the standardized partial regression coefficient of College, .73, is larger than the correlation coefficient between College and Magnet Enrollment, .57. The controlling effects of the other variables, increases the strength of College-Magnet Enrollment relationship.

Table 1

Regression Results of Magnet Participation on Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictor Variables

Variable	Coeff.	*S.E.*	St. Coeff	*P*
Constant	.072	.041	.000	.084
College	.727	.084	.731	.000
Minority	-.045	.037	.125	.235
Proximity	.012	.004	.369	.002
Income	-.003	.002	-.209	.073
ProbB	-.018	.022	-.091	.408^{a}

Pearson Correlation Matrix:

	College	Minority	Proximity	Income	ProbB
College		-.26	-.29	.41	-.31
Minority		.60	-.58	.86	
Proximity		-.70	.69		
Income					-.60
MagEnrol	.57	.06	.22	.09	.05

Note: Dependent variable: MagEnrol, Minimum value=.00, Maximum value=.42, Standard deviation=.08, N=89.

Regression Results: R^2=.51, MLTPL R=.72, ADJST'D R^2 =.49, STANDARD ERROR of EST.=.06.

The coeffiencts (and other estimators) for both Minority and PropB, while shown as if from a single run, are from separate runs. This is necessitated by their high intercorrelation (.86). Thus, for instance, Minority's coefficient is based on an equation that includes all variables but PropB. PropB's coefficient is from an equation that excludes Minority. The summary statistics (R^2, etc., are from the equation excluding PropB) because of its weaker independent effect.

lege brings about 3/4s of a percentage point increase in magnet enrollment. A one standard deviation increase in college (an increase of about 8%), produces an average increase in magnet enrollment of 5.6%, which is 70% of a standard deviation. Clearly, in this district, there is evidence that, other things equal, neighborhoods with higher proportions of college educated adults enroll more students in magnet schools.

Due to the unit of analysis, there is unavoidable error in the estimates of the effects of the college and income variables. Neither variable measures the characteristics of the parents who actually enroll their children in magnet schools (as separate from the other adult residents); rather, as described earlier, the measures are of neighborhood (attendance area) characteristics. While the relationships of these neighborhood characteristics to magnet enrollment are accurately measured and are by themselves important and revealing information, the caveat is that individual level measures might show different statistical estimates. However, it is unlikely that a large difference would be found with individual measures that would require essentially an absence of a correlation between the neighborhood characteristics and individual processes. It seems highly improbable that from the high educational attainment neighborhoods, it is the low educational attainment parents actually enrolling in magnet schools.

Proximity's coefficient suggests that closer magnets are preferred and yields an estimate of the strength of the relationship. For every magnet school that is within a two mile radius from a given attendance area, magnet enrollment from the attendance area goes up by 1.2%. This increment can be interpreted better in relation to the total range on the magnet enrollment variable, from 0% from several neighborhoods on a far city boundary to 42% from a neighborhood relatively close to magnets and high on the college variable. About 2\3s of neighborhoods, however, have magnet enrollment values that are within 8% of the mean level of magnet attendance, 10%.

That the income variable fails to achieve statistical significance is important. This finding runs counter to polemic claims that magnets are for rich kids or that they are like publicly funded private schools. Even if this finding is a statistical artifact, and there actually is a positive relationship that this analysis fails to reveal, it is unlikely that the true relationship is large given that the empirically discovered relationship is negative. (For comparison purposes, a one standard deviation increase in income [$5,472] diminishes magnet enrollment by 1.6%.) At least in this district, magnets appear not be a factor in stratification of schools by family income. However, one might speculate that as income increases, parents living in the city increasingly enroll their children in private schools. Thus, in one sense, income is associated with the pursuit of school choice, but the choice is not a public school at all, magnet or otherwise.

Finally, the lack of statistical associations between magnet enrollment and either percentage Black children in the neighborhood and percentage of Black children in the neighborhood school is encouraging. There is no evidence that magnet schools are avenues for flight from racial minorities, either from a neighborhood with higher proportions of Black students or from a neighborhood school with higher proportions of Black students. However, this finding should be interpreted in the context of other policies in the system: it uses a majority to minority enrollment policy to facilitate racial balance in regular neighborhood schools and it employs racial balance guidelines for its magnet schools.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main findings of this study address two issues important in the debate over school choice. The role of parent education was discussed first, then the influence of neighborhood proximity to schools of choice.

The relationship between magnet enrollment and neighborhood educational attainment suggests magnet schools either appeal more strongly to parents with higher levels of education or parents with higher levels of education are more successful at gaining admissions to magnet schools; gaining admission covers everything from finding out about magnet schools to actually submitting a timely and appropriately filled-in registration form. At least in the district studied here, selective admissions is not part of the explanation of the observed relationship between magnet enrollment and neighborhood variables.

The variables alluded to above, magnets appeal and success at gaining admission are theoretically distinguishable, but in reality closely intertwined and likely to be functions of deeper sociopsychological factors underlying parent educational attainment. As discussed earlier, people who pursue formal education and the credentials conferred are by these very actions evincing a strong commitment to schooling and academic knowledge. When they become parents, this strong commitment is likely to be manifested in, among other things, vigilance about educational opportunities for their children. Vigilance would include such actions as conversing with other parents more frequently about school issues; paying attention to informational mailers from the school district and reading closely magnet program descriptions, locations, and registration policies; and visiting and learning about reputations of schools that are candidates for choice in an open enrollment process. While all parents profess (albeit to varying degrees) a commitment to education and voice attitudes of support, parents are not all equally involved in and supportive of their childrens' academic success. In short, the same sociopsychological factors that explain correlations between parent educational attainment and academic support in the home presumably contribute to the magnet enrollment distributions observed here.[7]

Is it inequitable if magnet schools' student bodies are disproportionately composed of students from higher educational attainment homes? It depends on one's theory of equity, a full elaboration of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Briefly, however, there are at least three critical considerations. The first is equality of access to information. If the district has provided adequate information to parents, that is, if the district has utilized multiple media and presented information in ways accessible and informative to parents of differing ethnic and social class backgrounds, then one source of potential inequity is mitigated. Supported with appropriate information and encouraged to participate in school choice, it is possible that parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds could ultimately find school choice an empowering change. Glenn (1993) and others (e.g., Coons, 1981; Sowell, 1983) have been critical of the low expectations many scholars seem to have for parents' capacity to be informed and to exercise choices wisely. "We should not be too quick to accept that 'ordinary' parents cannot make sound choices among the schools available, nor to dismiss the possibility that the process of doing so—with appropriate support—will in fact strengthen them as parents" (Glenn, 1993, p. 74).

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[7] These differences are consistent with research identifying a wide range of behavioral and attitudinal outcomes associated with educational attainment, including more liberal attitudes, lower "traditionalism," greater civic involvement, and other outcomes likely to affect school choice (Kohn, 1969; Wright & Wright, 1976).

A second consideration is the equality of resources among schools. Although it is not always the case, magnet schools have been known to receive extra resources (Blank et al., 1983; Viadero, 1991). Some argue short-term resource infusions into magnet schools are justified to launch unique programs on the grounds that some specialized programs require additional start-up resources to succeed and that the government has an interest in creating incentives to promote voluntary integration. However, it is difficult to make the case for permanent policy-supported resource advantages for magnet schools—all the more so if they tend to attract children from more educationally involved families to begin with. Such a position runs afoul of basic tenets of equal educational opportunity.

The third equity consideration has to do with whether distributions of children among schools resulting from parent choice policies are less equitable (i.e., more segregated or stratified by SES) than under centralized, nonchoice enrollment policies. One alternative to choice is the traditional neighborhood schools concept. But it is hard to argue that pure neighborhood-based enrollment policies are more equitable, for they reproduce neighborhood demographic patterns in the schools, with well-known segregative results. The other alternative, student reassignment policies for desegregation purposes, reduces racial isolation, but at the long term consequence of White flight, and also the loss of affluent parents to private and suburban schools. Research indicates magnet schools can reduce these losses (Armor, 1989; Bennett, 1989; Rossell, 1985; Rossell, 1990). If retention of Whites and middle-class parents in urban districts is important, then magnet schools may be a plus for equity if they help urban districts survive, even if they garner more than their "fair" share of students from academically supportive parents. In assessing impacts of parent choice, we must compare enrollment distributions in systems with magnet schools not to hypothetical ideals of perfectly balanced enrollment distributions, but to the real, available policy alternatives, and each one brings trade-offs.

In sum, equity issues raised by magnets and decentralized, parent choice-based enrollment processes are complex. The discussion above illuminates central considerations, but answers must await deeper analyses which need better data on enrollment distributions and their causes.[8] It is important to recognize, however, that the mere documentation of less or more of one type of student in magnets than another is not by itself evidence of inequitable conditions in education. Considerations of information support, parent opportunity to choose, and the priority of choice and educational alternatives as policy goals must be factored in.

Turning to the influence of proximity, the results from this study suggest that at the elementary level, parents will select geographically closer as opposed to more distant magnet schools. While it is reasonable to infer this reflects a deliberate preference for magnets when they are closer, we cannot exclude the possibility that it is the result of parents simply being more aware of magnets because they are closer. In any case, the observed effect was statistically significant, but not large.

The proximity effect documented here only scratches the surface of the proximity question. The larger question needing research is about the factors shaping parents' views about safe and convenient access to a good school. All parents want this, but parents do not all view safe and convenient or good school in the same way. Several decades ago, any school that was not a neighborhood school was considered inconvenient. Now, with widespread redistricting of school zones for school desegregation and the growing prevalence of school choice, busing has become a fact of life, more parents have become accustomed to it, and parents' options about school location are expanding. Parents doubtless differ in their perceptions of the risk of different modes of transportation for their children (e.g., walking, car pooling, busing), the value they attach to having a child at a close-by school, and the desirability of enrolling a child in a school in a neighborhood that may be different from the child's home neighborhood. Parents also are likely to differ on the values they attach to certain qualities of a school such as program, discipline, and school environment variables (Bauch & Goldring, 1995). These values will influence decisions about the worth of a long bus ride or a less convenient school location. Parents' beliefs and values on these issues must be understood so that policy decisions about transportation, enrollment, magnet programs, and magnet locations lead both to favorable (equitable and allocatively efficient) enrollment outcomes and to satisfied customers, well educated students and parents whose needs are well served.

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[8] See Archbald (in press) for a discussion of needed statistical indicators of conditions and outcomes of parent choice in public school systems.

States' and districts' deliberations over school choice can only be improved by empirical evidence on the enrollment results of parent choices. We need not only study parents' (and students') expressed beliefs and values concerning school choice decisions, but better documentation of parental preferences as evidenced by enrollment patterns in systems where choices are available (Young & Clinchy, 1992).[*] This study has brought empirical evidence to several leading questions in the school choice debate, and demonstrated an analytic method that could prove useful for more extensive studies.

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SEMI-PRIVATE CHOICE

2

OVERVIEW

THE NUMBER of states with charter legislation and the number of charter schools continue to expand. The National Study of Charter Schools reports that 36 states and the District of Columbia have charter legislation, with 1,484 charter schools serving more than 250,000 students as of September 1999.[1] This chapter provides an overview of the charter school movement, presenting articles that provide an understanding of the definition, history, and basic concepts of charter schools; it discusses the goals and implementation of charter school legislation; and it defines specific subtopics relevant to the charter school movement.

The first three articles are intended to provide a broad overview of the charter school movement. In the first article, Vergari provides an introductory overview of the charter school movement, including the definition, history, and basic concepts of charter schools. Schneider similarly provides background information on the charter school movement. She contrasts "strong" charter legislation and "weak" charter legislation. In addition, Schneider provides a brief overview of assertions and questions raised by both proponents and challengers of the charter school movement. Finally, the executive summary of the fourth-year report of the National Study of Charter Schools provides the most comprehensive and current descriptive information available on charter schools. The full report, *The State of Charter Schools 2000: Fourth Year Report* is available through the U.S. Department of Education's web site, http://www.ed.gov.

In the next article, Garn cautions us that there is great diversity in the ideologies and motivations behind charter schools that make the movement far from monolithic. He presents the ideological underpinnings of the charter school movement. Although Garn specifically examines one state's policy, his discussion provides a good description of three perspectives that often provoke charter school legislation: antibureaucracy, market-based education, and poor teacher professionalism.

Although Garn provides some discussion of how the ideologies behind the movement play out in practical terms, Wells and associates provide a more thorough examination of the assumptions and claims about what charter school reform was supposed to accomplish. In looking at the goals and implementation of 17 charter schools in 10 districts across California, the authors note the shortcomings of charter schools in terms of claims regarding accountability, autonomy and empowerment, efficiency, and choice for parents.

Noting the difficulties of implementation, Wohlstetter and Griffin specifically focus on the goals of charter schools related to teaching and learning. They explored how learning communities were created and sustained in 17 charter schools across three states. Based on their study, the authors suggest factors that are most likely to support the development of high-quality teaching and learning.

Manno, Vanourek, and Finn examine the goals and implementation of charter schools as they relate to serving disadvantaged youth. Using data from a

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multi-year study of 100 urban charter schools, they investigate assertions that charter schools do not adequately serve at-risk and disabled youth. The authors conclude that the charter school movement is promising for transforming public education in the United States, particularly in urban areas.

The remaining three articles address specific subtopics regarding charter schools. Russo and Massucci provide an overview of legal issues that may affect charter schools. They supply a legal definition of a charter school, discuss key constitutional questions that face charter schools, and note the legal challenges of labor relations and dealing with teachers' unions.

The final two articles address the subtopic of for-profit management of charter schools. Dykgraaf and Lewis discuss general issues related to for-profit entities, including cross-cutting strategies, communication, and public ownership of public schools. They specifically address how these schools' efforts to make money negatively affect students with disabilities. Zollers and Ramanathan argue that for-profit schools often ignore special education law and treat students with disabilities as financial liabilities.

Endnotes:

1. Beryl Nelson et al., *The State of Charter Schools 2000: Fourth-Year Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000). Available at http://www.ed.gov.

CHARTER SCHOOLS
A Primer on the Issues

SANDRA VERGARI
University at Albany, State University of New York

Charter schools are an intriguing innovation in the delivery of public education, and this educational reform policy has diffused rapidly across the United States. Minnesota adopted the nation's first charter school law in 1991, and charter school laws have since been adopted in 35 other states. Washington, DC has a charter school law; additional states have considered the idea.

The charter school reform attracts intense interest and debate, both in education policy circles and at all three levels of government. The interest arises from a variety of factors including frequent mass media attention, the interest of state lawmakers in the latest "hot" reform in education, the potential threat charter schools pose to traditional public schools, high levels of political activism by both proponents and opponents of charter schools, and an increasing federal interest in charter schools. In addition to the establishment of a federal grant program for charter schools, the federal government has commissioned a 5-year study of these new educational entities. State governments are also providing research grants for state-level studies.

The various operational and political facets of the charter school reform are fascinating subjects for careful analysis. Operationally, charter schools have been characterized as "quasi-public schools" that straddle the boundary between the public and private realms (Witte, 1996, p. 161; Loveless & Jasin, 1998). Politically, charter schools have attracted support from both the left and right ends of the ideological spectrum. Some advocates view charter schools as an interim step on the way to a full voucher system of education. Other supporters view charter schools as the best means to preserve public education by provoking traditional public schools to reform and thereby head off the threat of a full voucher system. While advocates of charter schools bring different ideological persuasions to the issue, they tend

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to agree on the meaning of the concept itself. Charter schools are intended to be publicly-funded entities operating free of many of the requirements under which traditional public schools operate.

THE CHARTER SCHOOL CONCEPT

RECENT HISTORY

The idea of charter schools began to receive attention in the U.S. in the late 1980s. It appears Budde, a professor of school administration, first brought the concept into the public discourse (Budde,1988, 1989; Wallis, 1994). The charter school idea was advanced by the late Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, in a 1988 appearance before the National Press Club (Shanker, 1988). Shanker argued that charter schools could increase choice within the public school system without undermining it. The notion of charters for schools is also mentioned in a widely cited 1990 book by Chubb and Moe. Finally, since the late 1980s, Minnesota researchers Kolderie, Nathan, and others, have actively promoted the charter school concept across the United States.[1]

THE BASICS

As originally conceived, charter schools are legally and fiscally autonomous educational entities operating within the public school system under charters, or contracts. The charters are negotiated between organizers and sponsors. The organizers may be teachers, parents, or others from the public or private sectors. The sponsors may be local school boards, state school boards, or other public authorities, such as universities. The organizers manage the schools, and the sponsors monitor compliance with the charter. The charters contain provisions regarding issues such as curriculum, performance measures, and management and financial plans.

Charter schools may be established in several ways. An existing school might convert to a charter school. Alternatively, a charter school can be formed as part of an existing school, comprising a "school within a school." Finally, a charter school might emerge as an entirely new entity.

In broad terms, charter schools are aimed at producing (a) increased responsiveness to the demands of parents, students, and teachers, and (b) greater opportunities for innovation in school management and pedagogy.

Increased responsiveness to the demands of parents, students, and teachers. Charter school advocates posit that a market-based approach to the delivery of education can produce better-performing schools. In choosing to send their children to charter schools rather than traditional public schools, parents issue important market signals. The opportunities created by attracting new students and the threats associated with losing students due to competition may serve to make schools more responsive to the demands of the people who use them. Charter schools failing to attract sufficient numbers of students and teachers, or failing to fulfill the provisions of their charters, are to be closed. As a byproduct, the possibility of losing students to charter schools is expected to spur greater accountability on the part of traditional public schools. Charter schools are also aimed at providing low-income families with the types of educational options that have largely been available only to wealthy families able to afford the tuition expenses of private schools. Charter school advocates envision a variety of learning environments for parents, students, and teachers to consider.

Greater opportunities for innovation in school management and pedagogy. Charter school proponents typically assert that the current system of public education is rife with bureaucratic obstacles that stifle diversity and flexibility in the delivery of education. Such obstacles include intrusive school boards, stringent teacher certification requirements, collective bargaining rules, and regulations regarding curriculum and other facets of school operations.

As legally and fiscally autonomous entities, charter schools enjoy the freedom to make their own decisions regarding matters such as personnel, curricula, and contracting for services. Autonomy in decision making permits charter school managers to employ new education delivery mechanisms that might prove superior to those commonly used by the school district. For their part, teachers might play a direct role in school decision making and also enjoy flexibility to use their preferred instructional methods.[2] Charter school proponents avow that such schools have the potential to promote a sense of empowerment and team spirit among teachers, parents, and students.

Managerial and educational methods that prove successful in charter schools can be replicated in traditional public schools. Further, the publicity enjoyed by successful charter schools is expected to place increased pressure on the traditional educational system to reform.

THE CHARTER SCHOOL MODEL

The nine components below comprise what charter school advocates might view as the "ideal type" of charter school law.[3]

Organization: A variety of public or private actors are permitted to establish and operate charter schools.

Sponsorship: More than one type of public authority is permitted to sponsor charter schools.

Legal Status: Charter schools are non-sectarian public schools that exist independently of a school district. Charter schools are legally and fiscally autonomous entities, free to make their own decisions regarding school operations.

Regulations: Charter schools receive waivers from most state and local school regulations. Exceptions are regulations regarding health and safety, civil rights, fiscal accountability, performance requirements, and other restrictions specified in the charter.

Accountability: The site for decision making and accountability is the school itself. Parents and the sponsoring public authority hold the charter school accountable for student outcomes. Failure to attract sufficient students and teachers, or a failure to meet the provisions of the charter, result in revocation of the charter by the sponsoring body.

Admissions: Charter schools may not charge tuition, and admissions policies must be nondiscriminatory. Where demand exceeds available space, students are chosen by lottery. Charter schools are schools of choice, and students are not required to attend such schools.

Funding: A charter school receives the full public funding allotment associated with its student enrollment. A charter school with "at-risk" or disabled students is eligible for the same grants available to traditional public schools with such students. Charter schools are able to apply for state or federal grants to help with start-up costs.

Teachers: Teachers may work as employees or as managers of the charter school. Teachers previously employed by a school district retain leave protections such as seniority and retirement benefits if they choose to return to the district within a specified period of time. If there is a collective bargaining unit for the charter school teachers, it is separate from any school district bargaining unit.

Number: A substantial number of charter schools are permitted within a state.

CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS IN THE STATES

Legislators promoting charter school laws compatible with the ideal type have encountered strong opposition from teachers' unions and school boards. Overall, 15 of the charter school states and the District of Columbia have relatively permissive charter school laws whereas the remaining 21 states' laws are relatively restrictive. The most permissive laws allow for all or most of the following:[4]

- more than one public authority authorized to sponsor charter schools
- conversions of existing schools as well as new charter schools
- charter school autonomy from the local school district
- waivers of most state and local school regulations
- a substantial or unlimited number of charter schools

No two charter school laws are identical. The laws placed into the simplified categories of "permissive" or "restrictive" in Table 1 differ in the extent to which they respectively enable or limit the development of charter schools. For example, the Texas law is restrictive with regard to sponsorship and sets a cap of 100 charter schools; however, the law is potentially quite permissive with regard to regulations. Charter school laws differ significantly in the details, and these details affect the extent to which charter schools are likely to proliferate in a given state (Hassel, 1998; Vergari & Mintrom, 1998; Mintrom & Vergari, 1997a; Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995).[5]

AMENDMENTS

State-level action need not end with the initial adoption of a charter school law. Charter school laws can be made more permissive or restrictive through the amendment process. Lessons learned from the implementation process can lead to refinements of existing charter school laws. A good example is found in the Michigan case of the Noah Webster Academy, a charter school with religious overtones that served a network of homeschoolers in 1994. Controversy ensued because Michigan state funds can be channeled only to schools that use certified teachers, and the state constitution prohibits public funding for religious schools. In October 1994, the state superintendent of public instruction cited accountability concerns

Table 1
State Charter School Laws and Years Adopted

Permissive Laws	*Restrictive Laws*
Arizona (1994)	Alaska (1995)
California (1992)	Arkansas (1995)
Colorado (1993)	Connecticut (1996)
Delaware (1995)	Georgia (1993)
Florida (1996)	Hawaii (1994)
Massachusetts (1993)	Idaho (1998)
Michigan (1993)	Illinois (1996)
Minnesota (1991)	Kansas (1994)
Missouri (1998)	Louisiana (1995)
New Jersey (1996)	Mississippi (1997)
New York (1998)	Nevada (1997)
North Carolina (1996)	New Hampshire (1995)
Ohio (1997)	New Mexico (1993)
Oregon (1999)	Oklahoma (1999)
Pennsylvania (1997)	Rhode Island (1995)
South Carolina (1996)	Texas (1995)
Washington, DC (1996)	Utah (1998)
	Virginia (1998)
	Wisconsin (1993)
	Wyoming (1995)

when he refused to approve state funding for the Noah Webster Academy. This experience led many states to ban the use of charter schools for home-based education.[6] To date, many of the amendments to charter school legislation pertain to the number of charter schools permitted in a state (Vergari & Mintrom, 1998).

EMERGING CHARTER SCHOOLS AND THEIR STUDENTS

As of June 1996, 251 charter schools were operating in the United States, and 235 (94%) of these schools were located in six states (Kolderie, 1996a).[7] As of October 1998, 1,128 charter schools were operating in the United States, and 821 of these schools (73%) were located in seven states (Center for Education Reform, 1998).[8]

DIVERSITY IN GOVERNANCE AND CURRICULA

The charter schools emerging across the U.S. reflect a broad range of organizational and pedagogical approaches. For example, some schools are operated largely by educational management companies, whereas others emphasize the role of parents and teachers in school governance; some charter schools emphasize math and science, whereas others accentuate the arts and foreign languages; some schools use a "back-to-basics" pedagogical approach, and others have chosen alternative curricula.

URBAN AREAS AND "AT-RISK" STUDENTS

Charter schools have been aimed at breaking the mold of the large urban school and promoted as a way to restructure urban public education from within (Fusarelli, 1999). Many charter schools have been established in urban areas, often by minority leaders in those communities. Across the nation, a number of charter schools focus on special populations of students such as dropouts and students at risk of academic failure (Bierlein, 1997). Charter school laws in Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, and other states require or encourage that preference be given to proposals for charter schools that will serve "at-risk" students. Charter schools in Missouri are limited to the St. Louis and Kansas City school districts; newly formed charter schools in Ohio are limited to the "Big Eight" school districts and the Lucas County pilot project. The recently-adopted Oklahoma law permits a charter school to limit admissions to students residing within an "academic enterprise zone." The law defines such a zone as a geographic area within a school district in which 60% or more of the children who reside in the area qualify for free or reduced price lunches.

STUDENT POPULATIONS

In the earliest days of the charter school movement, critics envisioned that charter schools would lead to "cream skimming" and elitism. Charter school students were expected to be the White, bright, and economically advantaged students in a school district. However, such a trend has not materialized. According to the latest data (1996-1998) from the National Study of Charter Schools, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, most charter schools had about the same percentage of White students as their district average (RPP International, 1999). Over 70% of charter schools were within 20% of the average district percentage of White students, and 16% had a higher percentage of students of color than their surrounding district. The remaining 12% of charter schools had a lower percentage of students of color than their surrounding district. Charter schools in 14 of the 24 states with charter schools enrolled a considerably higher percentage of non-White students than did the other public schools. The study reports that, on average, charter schools have enrolled a larger percentage (22%) of Black students than all public schools (16%).

Across the nation, the percentage of charter school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches was nearly the same as the percentage for students in all public schools in the charter states. However, in eight of the charter states, the percentage of charter students eligible for free or reduced lunch was at least 10% higher than in all public schools.[9] In five of the charter states, the percentage of charter students eligible for free or reduced lunch was at least 10% lower than in all public schools.[10]

During the 1997-1998 school year, students with disabilities comprised 8% of the student population in charter schools in the 24 charter states, compared to 11% of students with disabilities in all public schools in those states. Although the percentage of disabled students varied little across the states for all public schools, it varied greatly across the charter schools. In most states, the overall percentage of students with disabilities in charter schools was similar to the percentage of students with disabilities in all public schools (RPP International, 1999).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS

The more restrictive the charter school law in a given state, the less likely one is to find educational entrepreneurs applying to open charter schools there. In states with permissive charter school laws, interest in establishing charter schools has been high, particularly in urban areas; and waiting lists for charter schools are common.[11] As state charter school laws have been implemented, numerous logistical, policy and political issues have emerged. Below, I highlight several issues currently being evaluated and debated.

CHARTER-GRANTING AGENCIES AND THE POLITICS OF SPONSORSHIP

The politics of the implementation process influence the extent to which charter schools will flourish in a given state. For example, tensions between sponsoring school district boards and charter schools may inhibit potential charter school organizers from attempting to establish new charter schools. Hence, proponents of charter schools emphasize that an entity other than (or in addition to) the local school board should be permitted to authorize charter schools in each state. As indicated in Table 2, 27 charter school laws permit an entity other than the local school board to either approve or order local board approval of a charter school.

START-UP COSTS AND FACILITIES

Due to the lack of provision made for start-up funding in most charter school laws, charter school operators face significant financial challenges in the planning stages. Frequently foremost among these challenges is the need to acquire an appropriate school facility. Charter schools have been set up in former motels, warehouses, and storefronts. In a study of a sample of charter schools across the United States, Finn, Bierlein, and Manno (1996) found that most were operating in "what could charitably be termed minimal facilities." In order to make these facilities "usable at all, immense amounts of improvisation have been required" (Finn et al., 1996). Facilities issues are less of a hurdle for conversion charter schools that were formerly traditional public schools or private schools. Moreover, states may apply for federal funds to assist charter schools with start-up costs. Charter school organizers need fundraising expertise. In some states, private educational management companies have begun to provide charter schools with start-up funds and advice on how to obtain loans from banks.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

Charter school consultants note that charter school organizers are highly enthusiastic and dedicated. However, as one consultant has noted, organizers may have "powerful visions about curriculum and instruction," yet fail to "appreciate the difficulties of putting together the legal and operational structure to support these visions."[12] Charter school organizers may initially

Table 2
States Permitting an Entity Other Than the Local School Board to Sponsor Charter Schools

Arizona	The state board for charter schools and the state board of education (SBE) may sponsor charter schools.
California	On appeal, the applicable county board of education may approve charters, as can the SBE.
Colorado	On appeal, the SBE may require local school board approval of a charter.
Connecticut	State charter schools are approved by the SBE.
Delaware	The SBE may approve charters.
Florida	State universities may approve charters for developmental research schools.
Georgia	The SBE initiates a process of mediation between the organizers and the local board if a charter is denied.
Idaho	On appeal, the SBE may approve new charters.
Illinois	On appeal, the SBE may approve charters.
Louisiana	On appeal, the SBE may approve charters.
Massachusetts	The SBE approves all charters.
Michigan	Intermediate school districts, public colleges, and public universities may approve charters.
Minnesota	Private colleges, community colleges, state universities, technical colleges, or the University of Minnesota are permitted to sponsor charter schools.
Mississippi	The SBE approves charters.
Missouri	Public colleges and public universities may sponsor charter schools.
New Hampshire	On appeal, the SBE may approve charters.
New Jersey	The commissioner of education has final authority to approve charters.
New Mexico	The SBE has final authority to approve charters.
New York	The Board of Regents and the SUNY Board of Trustees are authorized to approve charters.
North Carolina	The University of North Carolina can serve as a sponsor in some instances. The SBE has final authority to approve charters.
Ohio	The SBE is permitted to authorize newly formed charter schools.
Oregon	On appeal, the SBE may approve charters.
Pennsylvania	A state charter school appeals board may approve a charter.
South Carolina	The SBE may remand an appealed application for action by the local board.
Texas	Various options exist for establishment of charter schools, and the SBE approves all open-enrollment charters.
Washington, DC	The Public Charter School Board may approve charters.
Wisconsin	Multiple sponsors in Milwaukee; elsewhere the local district is the sole potential sponsoring agency.

lack the breadth of expertise necessary for the successful operation of a charter school facility. Budgeting, personnel and payroll, fire and safety codes, food services, and accommodations for special education pupils are a few of the myriad responsibilities confronting charter school operators. These items may be less "glamorous" than curriculum and parental involvement issues, but proper planning in these areas has major import for the overall performance of a charter school. Clearly, charter school organizers need access to organizational and managerial expertise. In addition to existing education reform organizations and various nonprofit support entities emerging in the charter school states, for-profit entrepreneurs such as The Edison Project, SABIS Educational Systems, and Advantage Schools are now active in the charter school arena.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

The charter school policy innovation is one of several recent educational reforms aimed at altering the accountability mechanisms in the delivery of education (Mintrom & Vergari, 1997b). A key component of the charter school concept is the notion that accountability for rules is replaced by accountability for results. In return for relief from the bureaucratic rules and regulations imposed on traditional public schools, charter schools are supposed to be held to a higher standard of accountability for results. If a charter school does not meet the provisions of its charter, fails to uphold applicable state and local rules, or lacks support from parents, teachers, and students, it is to be closed.

The accountability arrangements for charter schools continue to be developed. Thus far, charter-granting agencies across the United States have approached their oversight activities with varying levels of capacity and expertise. Moreover, they have displayed a range of interpretations of their responsibilities (see Hassel & Vergari, 1999). Some charter schools have not been prompted and helped to define precise, measurable goals for which they can be held accountable, and the criteria for charter school renewal have yet to be clearly specified in a number of states.

To date, about 34 charter schools have been closed. A majority of these schools had their charters revoked; in other cases, the charter-granting agency denied charter renewal, and the remaining schools closed voluntarily. Faulty management or deficiencies in the academic program have been the leading reasons for the charter school closures, and several schools have been forced to close due to inadequate enrollment (Center for Education Reform, 1999). Charter school advocates note that such closures are unfortunate but uncommon, and that they represent a form of accountability for performance that is typically missing from the traditional public school system.

Assessment is a crucial issue for charter schools, and assessment requirements vary across the states. Charter schools face the same assessment difficulties and controversies that have long confronted traditional public schools. Charter school proponents frequently cite high levels of enthusiasm on the part of charter school teachers, parents, and students as evidence that charter schools are performing very well. Although desirable, enthusiasm is an insufficient indicator of the overall performance of a charter school. Lawmakers seeking to justify support for the continuance and expansion of charter schools will likely require additional evidence of charter school quality. Hence, charter school operators face incentives to engage in comprehensive assessments of performance that include regular, standardized measures of student achievement. Although imperfect and counter to the philosophy of many charter schools, standardized tests are a key means for charter schools to demonstrate progress toward the achievement of their academic goals.

Comprehensive, systematic studies of the impact of charter schools on student achievement have yet to be completed. Mass media reports across the states have suggested that student test score results for charter school students have been mixed. In their first year or two of existence, student achievement scores for charter schools may be more of a reflection of students' previous educational experiences than the performance of the charter school. Moreover, methodologists disagree on how best to assess the effects of school choice programs such as charter schools on student achievement (Lamdin & Mintrom, 1997; Powers & Cookson, 1999).

CRITICS' CONCERNS

Opponents of charter schools frequently cite several concerns, including concerns about the diversion of public funds from traditional public schools to charter schools and skepticism about adequate public oversight of charter schools and charter school accountability. Charter school opponents also argue that charter schools operate under certain favorable conditions not enjoyed by traditional public schools such as exemption from state and local regulations, low student-teacher ratios, high levels of parental involvement, and the ability to cap enrollments.

Broader issues raised by observers of school choice and charter schools include equity concerns and questions about the extent to which charter schools may undermine the critical socialization functions of public education in a diverse democracy (see Bosetti, 1999; Henig, 1994; Gutmann, 1987). For example, to what extent are parents informed about the organization of a new charter school in their community and their children's eligibility for admission?[13] Are students whose parents are relatively uninvolved in their educational development at a disadvantage because their parents cannot or do not seek information about charter schools in their community?[14] In response to such questions, charter school advocates note the inequitable features of the traditional public system and suggest that charter schools enhance equity by offering new options for low-income families formerly restricted to the local traditional public school.

CONCLUSION

The charter school movement is a significant development in education policy in the United States. Charter schools require new ways of thinking about the delivery of education on the part of lawmakers and other stakeholders. It is still too early to form valid assessments regarding the "success" or "failure" of the nascent, multifaceted charter school movement. School choice issues are the subject of intense passion among both stakeholders and analysts, and charter schools are no exception. Accordingly, there is much need for sound research on charter schools. In addition to careful assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of charter schools in their own right, policymakers and other analysts would benefit from systematic research on the extent to which charter schools are spurring change throughout the public school system (see Rofes, 1998).

Although it is premature to make bold pronouncements about charter schools and the evolution of public education in the United States, at least three conclusions can be advanced with confidence.. First, the proliferation of charter schools and interest in other forms of school choice indicate significant demand for alternatives to the traditional public education system. Such demand is particularly high in many urban areas where families appear desperate for alternatives to what are perceived as dysfunctional traditional public schools. Second, the very meaning of the concept of "public education" is now up for debate, and the charter school movement is provoking new questions and the development of new perspectives among educational stakeholders and analysts. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses displayed by the charter school movement offer valuable lessons for those who seek to preserve and improve the public education system in the United States.

NOTES

1. A more comprehensive historical account of the genesis of the charter school concept would include an examination of the evolution of the alternative and magnet schools movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and also intra- and inter-district public school choice programs. However, such an account is beyond the scope of this article. Moreover, Kingdon (1995) has astutely noted that attempts to trace the origins of policy ideas lead inevitably to infinite regress. He suggests that analysts focus instead on the factors that have made an idea take hold and grow. Nonetheless, advocates, opponents, and analysts of the charter school movement would do well to examine the strengths and weaknesses of previous efforts to introduce varying degrees of autonomy and diversity to public education (see Sarason, 1999).

2. This is not the case in some of the charter schools that are run by management companies.

3. The ideal type components are developed from Kolderie (1992, 1994, 1996a); Nathan (1994, 1996); and Bierlein and Mulholland (1994).

4. These criteria are based on Kolderie's (1994; 1996a) classification scheme for "live"and "dead" laws.

5. There are also several basic commonalities found in most of the charter school laws, including leave and retirement protections for teachers who leave the employment of a school district to teach at a charter school, prohibition of religious charter schools, and the requirement that charter schools be tuition-free.

6. California, however, does permit home-based charter schools.

7. The six states were Arizona (46), California (89), Colorado (24), Massachusetts (15), Michigan (44), and Minnesota (17). (Data from Kolderie, 1996b.)

8. The seven states were: Arizona (271), California (156), Colorado (61), Florida (75), Michigan (139), North Carolina (59), and Texas (60). (Data from Center for Education Reform 1998.)

9. The eight charter states were Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

10. The five charter states were Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, and New Mexico.

11. According to the Third-Year Report of the National Study of Charter Schools, 70% of charter schools reported having a waiting list (RPP International, 1999).

12. Comments made by Eric Premack (Institute for Education Reform, University of California-Sacramento) at the annual conference of the Association of Educators in Private Practice, Milwaukee, WI, August 1996.

13. For a discussion of information issues and school choice, see Lamdin & Mintrom (1997, p. 222).

14. An article in *Education Week* reported that a Boston parent spent a summer checking out 35 public, private, and parochial schools with her son (Sommerfeld, 1996).

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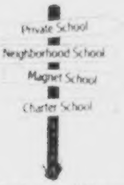

Public School Alternatives

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Tracking the Charter School Movement

By Ann M. Schneider, Ed.D.

Support appears to be growing for the charter school movement. In seven years, this reform effort has managed to develop an increasingly strong foothold in the struggle for choice, local control and improved student performance that has eluded many other initiatives. Traditionally opposed political, social and educational interests have identified the charter school movement as an effective means to address their divergent concerns. As more states consider charter legislation, the pro/con debate is expanding. The purpose of this update is to track the progress of the movement and to identify recurring issues.

The 1997–1998 school year marks a significant increase in the number of charter schools that were established. More than 166,000 students attend charter schools. President Clinton, a proponent of choice, has called for the creation of 3,000 charter schools by 2000—60 per state. Ray Budde, often cited as the founder of the movement, has issued his own projections. By 2003, he anticipates 5,000 charter schools with an enrollment of 1.5 million students, supported by approximately $3 billion in tax revenue. He says we have a "one-in-many-generations" chance to recreate education as we know it. He encourages everyone to join this "grand crusade" toward decentralization (Budde, 1996, p. 73).

> *A "strong" charter law generally allows groups of teachers, parents, nonprofits and/or corporations to be granted a charter.*

Strong vs. Weak States

Currently, charter schools remain concentrated in states whose laws are classified as "strong," allowing charter schools to operate as legal entities with a great deal of autonomy. The criteria for such a categorization was developed by Bierlein and Mulholl (1994) of the Morrison Institute. The criteria examine exactly who is allowed to grant charters within the state, the degree of fiscal and legal autonomy granted under the respective charters, whether or not start-up and/or other costs are planned for or set aside for the new charter schools, and whether or not exemptions are granted for existing state laws or regulations.

A "strong" charter law generally allows groups of teachers, parents, nonprofits and/or corporations to be granted a charter. Those organizations are viewed as less susceptible to grassroots pressure, lobbyists and conflict of interest regarding the establishment of charter schools than local school districts or boards of education. Charter law is "strengthened" if there are provisions, as in Colorado, for appeal when the charter is denied.

Inclusion of start-up costs is another strong legislative feature. Governor J. Fife Symington, III (R) of Arizona, a state with strong charter legislation, has recently asked for more financial support by seeking property-tax exemptions for corporations that allow charter schools to use existing facilities. Recent charter legislation in Pennsylvania offers financial incentives to districts directly affected by newly formed charter schools. Michigan charters more than half of its charter schools through the auspices of Central Michigan University. In the past year the courts upheld the constitutionality of charter schools receiving public funds.

States with "weak" charter legislation generally bestow sole authority for a charter to the local district. Pioneer charter states Minnesota and California are now viewed as weak because of this proviso. Revisions are under consideration to strengthen charter school legislation in these states. Quotas, caps or arbitrary limits on the number of charters have also been viewed as weak factors. Experience, however, has shown that some limits on start-ups in the early years of charter legislation are reasonable, empowering rather than limiting charter school development. An unusual quota system exists in Louisiana: Charters may only be granted in districts that have a population of more than 20,000, thereby eliminating 58 of the possible 88 districts from applying for charters (Bierlein, 1996). Mississippi and New Hampshire have laws so directly tied to existing state regulations and current collective bargaining agreements that charter school supporters doubt that any charter schools will be established in those states (Schnailberg, 1997). Charter laws have been defeated, reintroduced and/or are pending in noncharter states. In some states, opponents have settled on the weakest possible charter legislation to thwart or delay attempts to get charter schools operational. There is no end in sight to the political wrangling.

California, Michigan and Arizona led the way in start-ups; together they encompass more than 65 percent of operational charter schools. However, more awareness and dialogue is building on a national level. Parents, teachers, superintendents and state superintendents, boards, governors, politicians and even the League of Women Voters have a voice and want to be heard. The concept of alternatives to existing public schools generates excitement. At the least, the charter school movement is forcing many disparate groups to reconsider traditional boundaries in an attempt to develop a stronger base in the mainstream of public education.

"Strong" Charter Legislation

Characteristics	Examples by State
• Charter sponsors and organizers are groups of parents, teachers and organizations other than school districts and school boards.	• Michigan, Massachusetts and Arizona
• Appeal process established for denial of charter application	• Colorado, Minnesota and California
• Fiscal incentives offered to charter schools or affected districts	• New Mexico and Pennsylvania
• Maximum freedom to operate via exemptions from existing state and local regulations.	• Arizona and Massachusetts
• Clear guidelines to evaluate improved student performance.	
• Charter organizers may use a variety of facilities; must meet existing health and safety guidelines.	• Arizona and Massachusetts
• No caps or quotas on number of charters that can be granted. (Some initial limits may apply).	•Arizona and Michigan

"Weak" Charter Legislation

Characteristics	Examples by State
• Sole chartering authority lies with local districts or school boards.	• Minnesota, California and Georgia
• No appeal process or no independent arbiter for charter denial.	• Georgia, Mississippi and New Mexico
• No start-up dollars appropriated.	• Most states except those most recent to adopt or amend
• Operations tied to existing state or local regulations.	• Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico and New Hampshire
• Quotas or caps governing the number of charters that can exist at one time	• Louisiana, Massachusetts, California, New Mexico and Wisconsin
• Organizers must utilize existing schools via "conversion."	• Wisconsin and Connecticut

Pros vs. Cons

Those who are opposed to charter schools on charges of elitism are concerned that charter schools will reintroduce segregation, forcing the remaining public schools to become the dumping ground for the most-difficult-to-educate students. Politicians in Florida, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia have voiced such concerns. In Idaho, some have expressed concern that extremist groups will seek charter status to establish their own schools (Marks, 1996).

Throughout the nation, many believe that funds diverted to charter schools are zapping the strength from other public school initiatives. In a panel discussion, Walter

Lamprey, superintendent of the Baltimore City Schools, commented that the conversation on charter schools, ". . . distracts us from our charge to fix [existing] public schools." Alex Molnar, of the University of Wisconsin, said, "What we need more of, not less of, is collective engagement in common civic institutions such as public schools, so that if you don't like the public school that your child is attending, you work to change that school." Others fear that charter schools will lead to a voucher system, or to schools-for-profit or will become essentially private schools funded with public monies (ASCD Education Update, 1997, p. 7).

Early research findings do not yield evidence of racial or economic inequities. Racial composition and economic concentration have roughly mirrored the population in the public schools and communities that contain the schools. In fact, a large number of charter schools serve at-risk students. However, charter schools have yet to address the challenge of educating large numbers of students with disabilities (McKinney, 1996). These students have been under-represented. Failure to adequately provide for special education students can have serious consequences for the future of the charter school movement.

Proponents believe that competition of choice will provoke more meaningful educational change and responsiveness on the part of the public school system. Whether the response is meaningful is debatable, but there is definitely a response. Charter school purists view the movement of in-district charters to be an aberration, but the in-district charter schools of Boston, as well as Arizona's marketing of traditional public schools, demonstrate that the traditional system can be challenged by market forces. In Colorado, for example, the success of Connect School motivated its neighboring district to charter its own experimental school, the Pueblo School for Arts and Sciences.

Charter schools force a reexamination of established political boundaries. The political right supports charter legislation as a natural extension of school choice. The left sees charter schools as a palatable alternative to vouchers. Democratic and Republican legislatures have passed charter laws in equal proportions. Support remains tied to different political agendas. It's still difficult to pass legislation. Charter legislation has been debated in the state of Washington for more than three years. Recently, House legislation was passed by a decided majority, despite the previous defeats in the Senate Education Committee. Increased national awareness of charter schools as well as sponsorship by the president may influence the Senate. In New York, charter legislation remains entangled in committees. A compromise position that establishes enough of a foothold to enable charter legislation could be enacted.

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Funding Issues and Other Resistance

Funding remains the most serious challenge to the movement. An earlier Hudson Institute report categorizes the following key obstacles: inadequate capital funding and facilities; cash flow problems and the difficulty of securing credit; a large number of laws and regulations and paperwork reporting that continue to be required of charter schools; struggles in obtaining local board sponsorship; difficulties managing the business side of the schools and inadequate planning time before the school attempts to open (Minno, 1995).

Federal support for charter schools has increased significantly. Allocations under the Public Charter Schools Program has been rising: $6 million in 1995; $18 million in 1996; $51 million in 1997; and a proposed $100 million for fiscal year 1998 (Riddle & Stedman, 1997).

While there has been significant resistance from both school boards and state and local teachers' unions, individual teachers have been active supporters of the charter movement. Their rationale ranges from support for more innovative teaching strategies to cutting the red tape in large districts. The very nature of a charter school calls for teachers to exercise more decision-making authority and to work more collaboratively with each other. Most charter schools are free to pioneer new evaluation methods and in some cases to offer merit pay. Though in most cases resistance to charter schools is still high, the NEA is funding research efforts in five affiliate charter districts. Also, districts have begun to use charter legislation to bolster inside efforts to generate public support for their agendas. The creation of in-district charters in Boston and the efforts of the Monterey, CA, district to convert to charter status blur the line between those in favor and those opposed to the charter concept.

Charter Schools at a Glance

Definition: A charter school is an autonomous, publicly funded school of choice that is designed and run by its operators under contract with a public sponsor. Groups of parents, educators, nonprofit organizations or corporations can apply for a charter per state regulations. The charter must include a clearly defined mission, well-defined roles and a plan for accountability for measurable improvements in student outcomes. Chartered for a specific period of time, the school must fulfill its promise of improvement in student achievement or close.

State	Enacted Charter Legislation	Number of Charter Schools 1996–97	Number of Charter Schools 1997–98 9/97 projected
Alaska	1995	3	15
Arizona	1994	166	247
Arkansas	1995		
California	1992	108	125
Connecticut	1996	0	12
Colorado	1992	31	50
District of Columbia	1996	2	3
Delaware	1995	2	3
Florida	1996	6	33
Georgia	1993	12	21
Hawaii	1994	2	
Idaho	1998		
Illinois	1996		1
Kansas	1994	0	1
Louisiana	1995	3	6
Massachusetts	1993	22	23
Michigan	1993	79	110
Minnesota	1991	19	25
Mississippi	1997		
Nevada	1997		
New Hampshire	1995		
New Jersey	1996	0	13
New Mexico	1993	5	
North Carolina	1996	0	34
Ohio	1997		
Oregon	1995		
Pennsylvania	1997	0	6
Rhode Island	1995	0	1
South Carolina	1996	0	1
Texas	1996	17	19
Utah	1998		
Wisconsin	1993	13	17
Wyoming	1995		

Source: The charter scene is changing daily. The purpose of this chart is to reflect growth patterns. This data was adapted from The Study of Charter Schools: First Year Report (1997), RPP international and the University of Minnesota. U.S. Department of Educational Research and Improvement. It has also been updated with information available at http://www.uscharterschools.org.—Ann M. Schneider

Almost universally, charters have unleashed pent-up demand from parents searching for alternatives. Waiting lists are common. Sonoma Charter School (CA) enrolls 230 students and more than 350 are on the school's waiting list; Chinook Charter School in Alaska enrolls 75, and has twice as many on its waiting list; C. K. Steele/Le Roy Collins Community Charter Middle School in Florida has as many students on its waiting list as in its classrooms, as does SABIS International Charter School in Massachusetts. Colin Powell Academy and Concord Academy, both in Michigan, have long waiting lists. Supporters view this as evidence of market forces at work. The fact that parents and students choose these schools is cited as evidence of success.

In a study conducted by the Goldwater Institute, the number one reason parents gave for their children leaving a public school in favor of a charter school was the same: curriculum. Arizona now has 166 schools, enrolling more than 17,000 students—4.1 percent of the state's student population. Only half of the parents surveyed by the Institute rated their child's previous school satisfactory; on the other hand, 92 percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their child's current charter school and 94 percent intended to send their child to the same school next year (Gifford & Keller, 1996).

How Effective Are They?

It's too soon to evaluate the effect and significance of most individual schools and certainly of the movement. It is imperative for district leadership to understand key issues to be able participate in the dialogue on parental choice. Proponents believe they are beyond "fad" stages and can rally more support.

Proponents cite emerging evidence of increased student achievement from a number of individual charter schools, particularly the O'Farrell in San Diego, Bowling Green in Sacramento, New Visions in Minneapolis, the Accelerated School in Los Angeles and Academy Charter in Castle Rock, CO. On the other hand, opponents quote the number of charter schools that have failed to show discernible gains in student achievement.

Although the National Study of Charter Schools (1997) will collect data on student achievement in randomly selected charter schools, the report is not due for three years. At this time, however, there is little evidence to support the claims of the proponents of charter schools. The schools themselves remain unique and distinct educational experiments. No two are alike. They are barely established entities with little fiscal history or long-term student achievement. Anecdotal evidence is the mainstay of the current movement.

Conclusion

There is one observable lesson that can be learned from the charter school movement: It calls for a high degree of motivation and enthusiasm to get it going and to sustain it. Parents, teachers and communities work in unison to establish unique learning environments. Teachers have accepted responsibility for results and diverse responsibilities, sometimes even lower wages in exchange for the freedom to be innovative. This type of commitment has increased student achievement and resulted in better teaching/learning communities in other settings and in other decades. However, the energy of innovation sometimes dissipates in the long term day-to-day struggles of an organization.

Questions remain: What will sustain initial success? Can the charter school movement sustain intense commitment? Are the outcomes of individual schools more related to establishing the correlates of effective schools than to instituting unique curriculum and focusing on targeted markets? No matter how the story finally unfolds, the emergence of charter schools across America has widened the spectrum of competition in public education. Proponents believe the movement will fundamentally challenge the structure of the public education system.❑

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Ann M. Schneider, Ed.D., is associate professor of Educational Administration at SUNY Brockport, and the coordinator of the Joint Doctoral Program, JDP, between SUNY Brockport and the University of Rochester. As president of the Collegiate Association for the Development of Educational Administration (CADEA), she is interested in the impact of charter schools on the preparation of school leaders.

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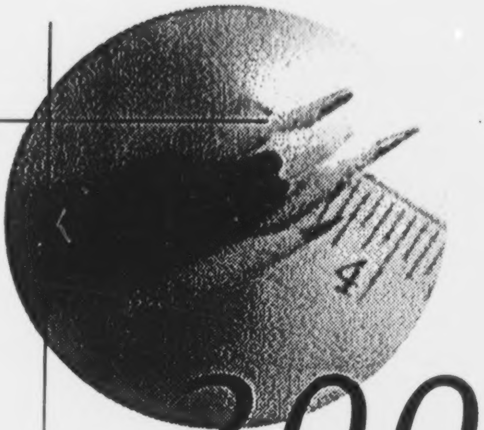

The State of CHARTER Schools 2000

RPP INTERNATIONAL

Beryl Nelson
Paul Berman
John Ericson
Nancy Kamprath
Rebecca Perry
Debi Silverman
Debra Solomon

FOURTH-YEAR REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Charter schools are public schools that come into existence through a contract with either a state agency or a local school board. The charter—or contract—establishes the framework within which the school operates and provides public support for the school for a specified period of time. The school's charter gives the school autonomy over its operation and frees the school from regulations that other public schools must follow. In exchange for the flexibility afforded by the charter, the schools are held accountable for achieving the goals set out in the charter including improving student performance.

This Fourth-Year Report of the National Study of Charter Schools provides descriptive information on charter schools that were operating in the 1998–99 school year. Additional reports of the National Study address broad policy issues concerning the charter school movement and its potential effects on America's system of public education.

Growth Trends: The number of states with charter legislation and the number of charter schools continued to expand in 1999.

- During the 1999 legislative session, three states—New York, Oklahoma, and Oregon—passed charter legislation, bringing the total number of jurisdictions with charter laws to 36 states and the District of Columbia. Charter laws have not remained static. Several states amended their charter laws during the 1999 legislative session. One state increased the number of charters that can be granted; two states that previously only allowed pre-existing public schools authorized newly created charter schools; two states expanded the number of agencies allowed to grant charters; and several states adjusted their charter school financing mechanisms.

- Of the 36 states and the District of Columbia with charter laws, 30 states and the District of Columbia had operational charter schools as of September 1999. Three of the 31 jurisdictions first opened charter schools in September 1999. Twenty-eight jurisdictions had operational charter schools at the time of our Spring 1999 survey. Nevada had only one operational charter school in Spring 1999 and that school did not respond to the survey, therefore, the school-level data reported here rely on responses from schools in 27 states.

- An additional 421 charter schools opened in 1999, bringing the total to 1,484 charter schools in operation in 31 states and the District of Columbia as of September 1999. Including multiple branches of a school operating under the same charter, the total number of charter school sites operating was 1,605 as of September 1999

- The demand for charter schools remains high—7 of 10 charter schools reported that they have a waiting list. This percentage is the same as reported for 1997–98.

- Twenty-seven charter schools closed during the 1998–99 school year. Since the first charter school opened in 1992, a total of 59 charter schools—nearly 4 percent of all charter schools that have ever opened—have closed.

- The number of students in charter schools increased in the 1998–99 school year by nearly 90,000, bringing the total to more than 250,000 students. This total represents 0.8 percent of all public school students in the 27 states with open charter schools as of the 1998–99 school year.

Characteristics of Charter Schools: Most charter schools are newly created, small schools.

- Most charter schools are small schools—the median enrollment in all charter school sites is 137 students per school, whereas all public schools in the charter states had a median enrollment of about 475 students. This is similar to the median charter school size of 132 reported for 1998–99.

- Nearly half of the charter schools have a grade configuration that deviates from the traditional elementary, middle, high school configuration. In 1998–99, one-quarter of the charter schools spanned K–8, K–12, or were ungraded compared to less than one-tenth of all public schools.

- Seven of 10 charter schools are newly created schools. Schools that opened in the 1998–99 school year continued the trend from previous years that most schools opening in the year were newly created. Newly created charter schools, with a median enrollment of 128 students, are smaller, on average, than converted pre-existing public schools.

- Eleven of the 36 states with charter laws allow private schools to convert to charter schools. The District of Columbia also allows private schools to convert to charter status. Ten percent of all charter schools were private schools prior to their conversion to charter status.

- The median student to teacher ratio for charter schools, 16 students per teacher, was slightly lower than the ratio for all public schools—17.2.

- About two-thirds of charter schools had a student to computer ratio of fewer than 10 students per computer. About two-thirds of all schools with computers used for instruction had computers in 75 percent of their classrooms.

Students of Charter Schools: Nationwide, students in charter schools have similar demographic characteristics to students in all public schools. However, charter schools in some states serve significantly higher percentages of minority or economically disadvantaged students.

- White students made up about 48 percent of charter school enrollment in 1998 compared to about 59 percent of public school enrollment in 1997–98. The percentage of white students in charter schools is slightly lower than reported in 1997–98

- Charter schools in several states—Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Texas—enroll a much higher percentage of students of color than all public schools in those states. Charter schools in Alaska, California, and Georgia serve a higher proportion of white students than do all public schools in those states.

- Nearly 7 of 10 charter schools have a student racial/ethnic composition that is similar to their surrounding district. About 17 percent of charter schools serve a higher percentage of students of color than their surrounding district while about 14 percent have a lower percentage of students of color.

- Charter schools enroll a slightly higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than do all public schools in the 27 charter states.

- The estimated percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students in charter schools is about 10 percent, which is about the same as for all public schools in the 27 charter states. The percentage of LEP students is about the same as reported for 1997–98.

- Without regard to differences across states, the reported percentage of students with disabilities at charter schools is about 8 percent, which is lower than the 11 percent for all public schools in these states.

The Founding of Charter Schools: Most charter schools seek to realize an alternative vision of schooling.

- Nearly two-thirds of newly created charter schools seek to realize an alternative vision of schooling, and an additional one-quarter of newly created schools were founded primarily to serve a special target population of students. More than one-third of pre-existing public schools report that they converted to charter status in order to gain autonomy from district and state regulations.

- Nearly 4 of 10 charter schools that were previously private schools converted to charter status to realize an alternative vision of education.

Challenges Implementing Charter Schools: Practically all charter schools have had to overcome obstacles during their development. Many of the obstacles have to do with resource limitations.

- Most charter schools continue to cite resource limitations—either lack of start-up funds or inadequate operating funds—as serious challenges to their implementation.

- Newly created charter schools were more likely to cite resource limitations as a major difficulty than pre-existing charter schools.

- A much lower percentage of charter schools that first opened in the 1998–99 school year report that start up funding was a major difficulty. For schools that opened in 1998–99 school year, 39 percent cited start up funds as a limitation, down from 59 percent for schools that opened in 1997–98 school year. The reduction is likely to reflect support from the federal charter school start up funding program.

- About 4 of 10 charter schools that were pre-existing public schools reported that state or local board opposition or regulations presented obstacles to their school's implementation. About 1 in 5 schools that were formerly public indicated that they had difficulty with teacher unions or collective bargaining agreements. Fewer than 1 of 20 charter schools reported implementation difficulty due to federal regulations.

Autonomy and Accountability: Charter schools have considerable autonomy. They are also held accountable to provide financial and student achievement reports to different constituencies.

- The majority of charter schools reported they had primary control over most areas critical to school operations, including purchasing, hiring, scheduling, and curriculum. Slightly fewer charter schools reported that they had control over student admissions, student assessment, and budget. Compared to newly created charter schools, a lower proportion of pre-existing public schools said they had primary control in every category of control.

- Most charter schools provide one or more non-instructional services (e.g., health services, social services, and before and after school care). Newly created charter schools that provided services were about equally likely to provide the services themselves or to make arrangements for an outside provider. In contrast, about 6 of 10 pre-existing charter schools rely on districts to provide services. Pre-existing private schools were equally likely to provide services themselves and use an outside provider.

- More than 9 of 10 charter schools were monitored for accountability in terms of school finances; nearly 9 of 10 for student achievement and for compliance with regulations; more than 8 of 10 for student attendance; and more than 6 of 10 for instructional practices. Each of these represent an increase in the percentage of schools reporting monitoring in these areas in 1996–97.

- The 27 charter states differ greatly in how they approach accountability, with some following a "centralized" state agency approach, others a "market-driven" approach, and still others a "district-based" approach that relies on local accountability within a framework of state testing.

- More than 70 percent of charter schools (based on a selected sample of schools) said they made reports during the 1997–98 school year for accountability purposes to one or more constituencies, including their chartering agency, school governing board, state department of education, parents, the community, or private funders.

- More than 9 of 10 charter schools used student achievement tests, augmented by other measures of student performance and school success, to make reports to their chartering agency, the school's governing board, and/or parents. More than one-third of charter schools used at least seven measures of school performance, including standardized tests and other measures of student achievement, parent and student surveys, and behavioral indicators.

Gregg Garn

The Thinking Behind Arizona's Charter Movement

Arizona's charter school legislation—often cited as exemplary—illustrates how three ideologies behind the movement play out in practical terms.

With U.S. policymakers increasingly receptive to new models of public education, charter schools have emerged as one of the most popular approaches to reform. Thirty-four states have approved charter school legislation, and a dozen others are debating this reform. Federal, state, and local policymakers have jumped on the charter school bandwagon, in part because its proponents come from diverse constituencies, including Republicans, Democrats, teacher organizations, business groups, and parent associations. The uniting forces are a general concern with the academic performance of pupils in district public schools and a belief that charter schools can improve the situation.

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For charter school reform, like most education policies, the devil is in the details. Proponents offer various rationales, and the rationale expressed in the legislation depends on which key actors—legislators, governors, interest groups, and others—have the most power to define the problem and design a remedial policy. Consequently, the dynamics of the debate change with every state context, and policies developed in one state differ dramatically from those created elsewhere.

To understand the differences, it helps to look at three underlying ideologies that motivate groups to support charter school reform—antibureaucracy, market-based education, and teacher professionalism—and to see how a specific state policy reflects these ideologies. Arizona's charter school legislation, frequently cited as the least restrictive in the United States, provides a useful example.

Antibureaucracy

The *antibureaucracy* ideology contends that state education codes, frequently pushing 1,000 pages, combined with district rules and an expanding slate of federal regulations, are choking out innovation. By legislating an ever-growing number of "best practice" methods and penalizing any deviation, various agencies have created a top-down system that preserves the status quo. Consequently, some charter school advocates "support the notion that educational innovations develop best from decentralized, bottom up sources" (Loveless & Jasin, 1998, p. 14). Policy provisions that allow charter schools to seek waivers from burdensome rules and regulations create the potential for "bottom up sources" to develop innovations that could ultimately increase academic achievement.

Provisions in the Arizona charter school statute reflect the antibureaucratic intent of policymakers. The most obvious exempts charter schools from all state statutes and rules relating to schools, governing boards, and school districts. Charter schools still must comply with federal statutes and general state statutes that involve health, safety, and civil rights. But this blanket waiver releases charter schools from much of the bureaucratic pressure that district schools experience.

In keeping with the antibureaucratic ideology, the Arizona Department of Education and the two state-level

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sponsoring boards (the State Board of Education and the State Board for Charter Schools) have taken a hands-off approach to monitoring charter schools. Both sponsoring boards require charter schools to complete an annual written report demonstrating progress toward the objectives written in the charter contract, but there is no formal evaluation of this self-report. Moreover, neither board monitors compliance with the charter contract, and contact between the charter school and the sponsoring board may occur only once a year.

The Arizona Department of Education has also lowered the reporting requirements for financial record keeping. District schools must follow the Uniform System of Financial Records for reporting financial information. However, charter schools follow a modified version that requires less specificity, reducing the time spent on paperwork. In addition, 22 charter schools (all sponsored by the State Board for Charter Schools) have been granted a waiver from following either the Uniform System of Financial Records or the charter school version. These schools need follow only generally accepted accounting principles.

The Department of Education has also been passive in monitoring charter schools to compensate for the lack of central district oversight. Special education offers a prime example. Statistics for the 1995–96 school year show that the 46 charter schools sponsored by state-level boards spent $503,707[1] on special education services out of $35,495,925 received from combined state and federal funds (Arizona Department of Education, 1997). This amounted to 1.4 percent of the charter school budget. District public schools spent slightly over 10 percent of their total operating budgets on special needs services ($387,385,037 of $3,805,813,156).

Department of Education administrators did not monitor the charter schools to determine the causes of this discrepancy. Although the Special Education unit of the Department of Education has since developed an outreach program for charter schools, an increase in the number of charter schools and a decrease in staff mean that only 25 charter school visits will take place each year.

Market-Based Education

A second ideology driving charter school reform is a ***market-based*** hypothesis. Critics contend that district schools continue to exist regardless of educational outcomes because they have a monopoly on public school students. Charter schools are schools of choice; they do not have a captive population. Thus, if district and charter schools must compete for students, market forces will ensure that schools with improved student outcomes will retain students, proponents believe. Conversely, schools that fail to improve outcomes will close when enrollment declines. By injecting competition into the environment, some charter school advocates believe, the quality of the product, in this case education, will improve (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

> *Instead of valuing teachers as professionals, some Arizona charter schools treat teachers like low-wage workers.*

Arizona policymakers have taken explicit steps to ensure a competitive market system. Purposely reducing the role of bureaucrats means that parents of charter school students have to take a more prominent role in school oversight. No longer can a parent assume that personnel from the Arizona Department of Education are monitoring what goes on in these public schools. This is precisely what supporters of the marked-based ideology envisioned—parents as the primary accountability mechanism.

Legislators argued that parents and students should have as many choices as possible among charter schools, with selection based on a child's educational needs. If a school meets their expectations, parents will keep their children enrolled. Conversely, if parents are not satisfied, they will remove their children, enrollment will dwindle, and the school will close. This is how the system is supposed to work.

Policymakers in Arizona noted that states with charter school policies permitting only district boards to approve new schools granted significantly fewer charters than states with legislation that included a state-level sponsoring board. Accordingly, they endowed the State Board of Education, which has responsibility for all public schools, to sponsor new charter schools. They then created a second state-level sponsoring board, the State Board for Charter Schools, that focuses solely on charter school issues.

Policymakers placed few limits on the number of new schools that could be approved each year. The Arizona statute allows districts to sponsor an unlimited number of schools each year and entitles each state sponsoring board to approve 25 schools a year.

Policymakers included two additional provisions to jump-start this educational market. First, any legal entity, including sole proprietorships, partnerships, not-for-profit corporations, and for-profit corporations, is eligible to receive a charter. Second, in addition to new start-ups and public school conversions, private schools may convert to charter school status.

In creating this market, Arizona policymakers expected some charter schools to fail. To steady the emerging market and address concerns related to financial stability, they created a million-dollar stimulus fund for start-up capital. To defray start-up costs, each charter school may apply for up to $100,000 from the state fund each year for two consecutive years. Policymakers did not expect these grants to cover all the costs, so they added several amendments to increase the likelihood that charter school operators could qualify for external financial support. For example, one amendment makes the charter school contract effective for 15 years. In contrast, most states allow a 3- to 5-year term before the charter school contract must be renewed. The Arizona provision allows charter school operators to project a longer revenue stream when securing loans from private lenders.

Arizona policy also gives charter school operators considerable flexibility in creating governing boards. The law requires each charter school to have a governing board but does not specify who must serve. Consequently, some governing boards may consist of as few as three individuals—including the director. Usually the director is a powerful figure, and the board defers to his or her judgment when making policy (Garn & Stout, 1998).

Although democratic participation suffers, this type of governance makes good business sense. Many Arizona charter schools are chartered to individuals, and directors see themselves as business owners who are financially responsible if the school fails. This governance structure gives the charter school operator additional control over school operations and expenditures, promoting financial stability.

The Arizona legislation states, "Any and all property accumulated by the charter school shall remain the property of the school." This allows charter school operators to own the property purchased for the school. There is some worry that individuals will charter a school; use public tax dollars to buy land, buildings, and equipment; and, at the end of the 15-year contract, not renew the contract but still own the property. Despite the potential for questionable use of public funds, policymakers have been interested in allowing charter schools to have a solid financial backing as they seek external funding.

Two provisions contribute to the long-term financial stability of Arizona charter schools. One is the independent financial status granted to charter schools. Those sponsored by either state board are funded directly from the state treasury. Charter school operators are free to spend funds, contract, and incur debt with few restrictions. A second factor is current-year funding. In contrast to district public schools, whose funding is based on prior-year enrollment, state-sponsored charter schools receive funding on the basis of the enrollment in the current year. Financial autonomy and real-time funding increase the potential for charter school stability.

The Arizona legislation has succeeded in increasing the number of educational choices for parents and students. Department of Education officials report that during the 1997-98 school year, approximately 25,000 students enrolled in 240 charter school campuses—almost 5 percent of Arizona's total public school population. But the amazing statistic is the rate of growth. Enrollment climbed from approximately 7,000 during the 1995-96 school year to 17,000 in 1996-97 to 25,000 in 1997-98.

Teacher Professionalism

The third ideology, grounded in the notion of *teacher professionalism,* assumes that because of their expertise, teachers—not administrators—should make and implement decisions that affect learning in the classroom. Thus, for some proponents, charter schools are about valuing the expertise of teachers and giving them control over instruction—factors that could ultimately bring about increased student achievement (Budde, 1988).

> *Charter schools are schools of choice.*

Although this ideology is behind many U.S. charter school policies, teacher professionalism was rejected in Arizona. In fact, one can argue that the Arizona charter school policy has devalued teacher professionalism. Charter school directors have tremendous autonomy when making personnel decisions. Charter school teachers are not protected by tenure provisions and can be hired and fired with minimal due process requirements. In addition, charter school teachers are not required to have state certification or even meet minimal educational standards. Thus, charter school directors can hire from a large pool of applicants.

However, removing tenure protections and basic competency standards affects the quality of the applicants. Instead of valuing teachers as professionals, some charter schools treat teachers like low-wage workers. For example, one charter school with multiple campuses paid teachers $9 an hour without overtime or benefits (Garn & Stout, 1998). Some of its teachers lacked college degrees. This example does not represent most charter schools in Arizona, but its existence illustrates the rejection of the teacher professionalism ideology.

Deconstructing the Monolith

Although proponents of charter schools hold up Arizona's policy as model legislation, those interested in this prominent reform should be aware of its underlying complexity. The "charter school movement" cannot be viewed as a single entity. Rather, an examination of the motivation behind charter school policies around the United States reveals significant differences. Far from being monolithic, the charter school movement reflects various, sometimes competing, ideologies. ■

[1] One charter school spent $217,760 of the $503,707 total (43.2 percent).

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Gregg Garn is Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma, 820 Van Vleet Oval, Norman, OK 73019-2041 (e-mail: ggarn@asu.edu). He was the co-principal researcher of a two-year study of Arizona charter schools and has monitored the reform since 1994.

Charter School Reform In California

Does It Meet Expectations?

BY AMY STUART WELLS AND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES,
UCLA CHARTER SCHOOL STUDY

From their study of 17 charter schools in 10 school districts across California, the authors conclude that, unless charter schools begin living up to some of the assumptions that have so far propelled them, it is time to reassess this magic bullet of school reform.

Illustration by Karen Stolper

THE CHARTER school movement has taken the country by storm, leaving in its wake 33 state laws allowing parents, educators, or entrepreneurs to create independent schools that are publicly funded but free from many state and local regulations. Charter school reform has been embraced by policy makers on both sides of the political aisle and by diverse groups of activists as one of the most promising solutions to the problems of public education.[1]

The view of charter school reform as a solution rests on a set of claims about what charter schools can accomplish. Proponents argue, for instance, that charter schools are held more accountable for student outcomes; enjoy greater freedom from the cumbersome public system; operate more efficiently; provide educational choices to parents and students, particularly those who typically have few choices in education; infuse healthy competition into a bureaucratic and unresponsive public system; and, finally, model innovative practices for other schools and educators.

Today, nearly a decade after these claims were first made, researchers are beginning to question some of them as they relate to the day-to-day experiences of educators and

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AMY STUART WELLS is an associate professor of educational policy in the Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles. She is also the principal investigator for the UCLA Charter School Study, which is jointly funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation. To obtain a copy of the final report, Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform, *send an e-mail message with complete mailing address to charter@gseis.ucla.edu*

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parents in charter schools and in nearby public schools. Our study of 17 charter schools in 10 school districts across California does just that, and this article presents some of our preliminary findings.

We have learned, for instance, that despite the hard work and dedication of the founders and operators of charter schools and despite the impressive gains many have made under trying conditions, charter school reform, for the most part, falls short of the broad and comprehensive claims made by its advocates.

We have learned that charter school reform is a laissez-faire policy that allows people greater freedom but provides them with virtually no support. As a result, what charter school operators can accomplish is often related to the resources, connections, and political savvy that they bring with them. Furthermore, without additional resources targeted toward the poorest communities, charter school operators have little power to overcome existing inequalities within the large and uneven public education system. In fact, in some instances — e.g., when they employ admissions criteria — charter schools can even exacerbate these inequalities.

Over the past 2½ years, we met hundreds of satisfied charter school educators and parents who were proud of what they had accomplished thus far, even as many wondered how long they could sustain the energy and drive needed to keep their schools open. But the extent to which this reform will become systemic or will touch large numbers of those students traditionally served least well by the public education system is not yet clear.

In fact, it might be that the broadest possible impact of the charter school movement will be in moving the public education system further down the road toward privatization and quite possibly vouchers by forming hundreds of schools that are increasingly dependent on private funds and better able to control who attends and who does not. We should note that this is not the result that all charter school supporters desire. Thus the issues of exactly how the successes and failures of charter school reform are measured and who defines the lessons learned have become increasingly important.

The UCLA Research Team

The research associates of the UCLA Charter School Study are graduate students Sibyll Carnochan, Camille Wilson Cooper, Jennifer Jellison Holme, Alejandra Lopez, Janelle Scott, Julie Slayton, and Ash Vasudeva. Former graduate students Ligia Artiles and Cynthia Grutzik contributed to the study but not directly to this article.

The Salience of California

In 1992 California became the second state, after Minnesota, to pass charter school legislation. During the 1997-98 school year, California was second only to Arizona in the number of charter schools (with 130 as opposed to 241 in Arizona) and first in the nation in the number of students enrolled in charter schools — nearly 50,000 or almost one-third of the national total of 166,000. Educators, policy makers, parents, and taxpayers across the country are interested in what Californians have learned from their state's vast experience with charter school reform.

The California law. The original 1992 California law won the support of many charter school advocates because it included provisions considered important in the creation of large numbers of charter schools. For instance, while only local school districts can grant charters in California, there is an appeals process through county boards of education. Under amendments to the legislation that were passed in the spring of 1998, charter petitioners may also appeal to the state board of education.

There are two ways to create charter schools in California: 1) convert an existing public school into a charter school, thereby creating a "conversion" charter school; or 2) form an entirely new school, thereby creating a "start-up" charter school. The 1992 California law allowed for 100 charters statewide, although the state board has regularly waived this cap, allowing additional charter schools to open. The 1998 amendments raised the cap to 250 charter schools for the 1998-99 school year and 100 more per year after that. The charter school law also waives most regulations of the California Education Code, except for those related to nondiscriminatory practices in admissions, to basic health and safety standards, and to participation in the state assessment program (which has gone through several transformations since the charter school law was passed).

Public funds for charter schools are routed through the local charter-granting school districts, and charter schools are funded according to their ADA (average daily attendance) times the per-pupil amount of the "base revenue limit" of their districts. ("Base revenue limit" in California is the maximum amount of general purpose state and local revenue that a district can receive.) In addition, the charter schools are entitled to receive state and federal categorical funds — e.g., Title I or special education funds — for students who qualify. However, charter schools are not automatically eligible for any of the capital funds from state or local tax revenues.

In addition, the California law originally allowed charter schools to hire uncertified and nonunion teachers. However, the 1998 amendments require charter school teachers who teach core subjects to have a teaching credential or be working toward attaining one. Union membership will remain optional.

In the original legislation, a charter school proposal had to be signed by either 10% of the teachers in the school district or 50% of the teachers in an individual school. Under the new law, charter school petitions must be signed by 50% of the permanent-status teachers in an existing public school that is converting to charter status. For start-up charter schools, the petition can be signed by the parents of one-half of the pupils who will attend in the first year or by one-half of the teachers needed to work in the new school.

The law requires that charter schools be nonsectarian, and private schools cannot be converted into charter schools. However, California charter schools are free to set admissions requirements "if applicable." Such criteria could include anything from prior achievement to contracts requiring a specified number of hours of involvement on the part of parents or codes of conduct for students. The law also asks charter school applicants to state how they will achieve an enrollment that reflects the racial balance in their local school district.

California charter schools at a glance. Some data are available on what charter school reform in California looks like so far. These data provide a broader context for our more focused study. For instance, a state-mandated evaluation of California charter schools found that about half of the charter schools in California are converted public schools and half are start-ups.[2] The start-up charter schools tend to be smaller, averaging 244 students, while conversion charter schools average 620 students. (The average public school in California enrolls 767 students.)

Furthermore, California charter schools are fairly evenly distributed across the state, although they are more likely to be in small towns (33%) or urban fringe/suburban areas (28%) than in central cities (19%) or rural areas (13%). The other 7% said that they were located in more than one of these areas or that the categories were not appropriate. Approximately 15% of California charter schools offer home-schooling programs.[3]

In terms of student demographics, white students are overrepresented in California charter schools, while Latino students are underrepresented. For instance, while 40% of the students enrolled in California public schools are white and 40% are Latino, in charter schools 48% of the students are white and only 34% are Latino. The percentages of African American and Asian students in the public schools and in charter schools are virtually the same.[4] In addition, RPP International found that 37% of the charter schools in California, as opposed to 17% of the regular public schools, had student enrollments that were 80% to 100% white.[5]

Furthermore, statewide averages regarding low-income students were similar for charter schools and regular public schools (43% for the former, 47% for the latter). But within-district comparisons show that 74% of the charter schools have lower proportions of students eligible for the subsidized-lunch program than do the regular public schools in their local school districts.[6]

Similarly, state-level data on limited-English-proficient (LEP) students show charter schools with an average of 20% LEP students, while regular public schools have an average of 24% LEP students. Within-district comparisons, however, show charter schools tend to have almost 8% fewer LEP students than the district average. Statewide data also show that charter schools enroll almost the same percentages of special education students as the public schools (8% in charter schools versus 9% in public schools). However, start-up charter schools enroll far fewer special education students.

These demographic data about California charter schools speak to the diversity within this reform movement and raise questions about who is served and where, about how similar charter schools are to the nearby public schools, and about how different charter schools are from one another.

Findings from the UCLA Charter School Study

In order to understand the experiences of people engaged in charter school reform, we selected 10 districts that differed on several key factors, including size; racial and socioeconomic diversity; location in an urban, rural, or suburban community; placement in the southern, central, or northern region of the state; and number, percentage, and types of charter schools in operation. Our sample consisted of five large urban districts, three districts that were mostly rural with some suburban housing, and two districts that were mostly suburban, though one included a rural section. All told, these 10 districts housed 39 charter schools or about one-third of the state total at the time we created the sample.

We chose 17 charter schools within these districts for in-depth research, sampling once again for diversity along various dimensions such as dependent versus independent relationships with districts; grade levels served; size and demographics of the student body; type or format of the school, including home-schooling and independent-study charters; philosophy of the school; and duration of the charter. The study included two suburban, five rural/suburban, and 10 urban charter schools. Eight of the 17 were conversion charter schools, and nine were start-up charter schools.

Data collection consisted of 462 semistructured interviews with district officials; with charter school founders, leaders, teachers, parents, governance council members, and community supporters; and with educators at nearby public schools. We also observed district and charter school meetings as well as classrooms in charter schools. Finally, we collected hundreds of district and charter school documents.

Our goal as researchers was to examine some of the assumptions or stated claims about what charter school reform was supposed to accomplish and to see how they were playing out in the experiences of people in these diverse communities.

Claim 1: Accountability

One of the most consistently cited benefits of this reform is that charter schools are held accountable for student outcomes in ways that regular public schools are not. Thus a very compelling argument for charter school reform is that it moves schools away from the current rule-based accountability system, driven by regulation of inputs, and toward a system of outcome- or performance-based accountability, wherein schools that do not perform according to a set of standards are closed. Proponents of charter schools argue that, because charters are granted for a set period of time (usually about five years), schools can lose their charters if they do not meet their stated educational goals.[7]

Yet what we learned from our visits to charter schools and districts across California is that talk of accountability is cheap. Actually implementing a system of accountability is another story. First, there are no consistent data on student outcomes for the first several years of charter school reform in California. The California Learning Assessment System was repealed in 1994, which left the state with no test. Although a new, temporary assessment (the SAT-9) was implemented during the 1997-98 school year, in the interim different districts and charter schools used an array of assessment systems that were not comparable across sites or over time. In fact, 14% of charter schools did not use any standardized tests.[8]

Furthermore, even if a standardized accountability measure did exist, very few "base-line" data are available for students in charter schools. It is not very helpful to look at one-shot test scores from a charter school and compare them to data from a "similar" public school. As mentioned earlier, charter schools can establish requirements for parents and students who wish to enroll. Therefore, many, but not all, charter schools have a self-selected pool of students with parents who are more involved.

Finally, "accountability" in the simplistic and technical sense of achieving narrowly defined student outcomes is not feasible with a reform like charter schools. After all, the central goal of the people who start such schools is to escape from an education system that they perceive to be too prescriptive.[9]

Accountable for what? As our study progressed, it became increasingly apparent to us that different people hope to accomplish different ends via charter school reform. Thus the central question of accountability becomes, Accountable to what standards and for what student outcomes? When we asked charter school operators what they hoped to accomplish, their responses reflected a wide range of dissatisfaction with the existing public school system. Still, three particularly salient themes did emerge: the desire for a specific curricular focus, the desire for a safer environment, and the desire for more flexibility in the use of public funds.

The charter school founders who wanted to create schools with a specific curricular focus were driven by widely varying views. Some were concerned that the public schools were not structured enough, while others thought that the public schools were too structured. Some believed that the public schools ignored the history and culture of certain oppressed minority groups, while others felt that the public schools overemphasized multiculturalism.

A founder of the Heritage Charter School* told us that, in the early planning stages, she met with several people from her ethnic community who were hopeful that the curriculum and instruction at the charter school would present history and culture from the point of view of the people in that community, not from the perspective of mainstream public school textbooks and curriculum. Other schools in our study were striving to implement a back-to-basics curriculum that embraced a more "mainstream" notion of what knowledge is valued. Holding all these schools accountable to a single academic standard could be tricky.

In terms of school safety, parents and educators at six schools in our study talked about students who enrolled in the charter schools because they did not feel safe in the large public schools. All these schools were either located in large urban school districts or drew students from adjacent urban districts. In five of these schools, the smaller size of the charter, coupled with the greater sense of community (often related to a more homogeneous student population), appeared to make the parents and students feel safer. Therefore, safety might be one of the factors for which some charter schools would hope to be held accountable.

Finally, another major impetus for going charter is so that the school operators can have more control over how to spend money and how to manage funds. This means different things in different charter schools, but one of the more common goals mentioned was to use the charter law to implement "flexible staffing" arrangements, which meant employing more part-time or less-expensive, nonunion teachers and staff. As one charter school administrator explained, "Money was lean. And we looked to some of our staffing models as the only way to accomplish some of the goals that we had."

Conversely, four of the charter schools in our study were started in part to bring new students — and thus new revenue — into the districts. At one of these schools — a home-schooling/independent-study charter — this new revenue allowed two district teachers to keep their jobs in the face of impending layoffs.

The opportunity to reallocate funds to change their facilities was the impetus for two directors of conversion charter schools. One of these schools reallocated money to build a new building and the other to convert an empty lot into an athletic field.

Thus the value of these alternatives will not be accurately measured by state-imposed assessment. In fact, if you listen to charter school operators, there is no one standard to which all these schools ought to be held accountable because the schools are engaged in this reform to accomplish different ends.

Accountable to whom? The other interesting dilemma regarding the accountability of charter schools is the confusion regarding to whom these more autonomous schools are to be accountable. Some proponents of charter reform talk about different forms of accountability, including "market" accountability, which means that charter schools must be more responsive to the needs of parents who can simply "vote with their feet" and leave the schools.[10]

At the same time, the chartering document itself serves as a formal agreement between the charter school and the granting agency. In theory at least, this agreement spells out the goals, purposes, and desired student outcomes of the charter. In reality, however, these outcomes are often ill-defined. Thus charter-granting agencies, which in California are local school boards, are put in the difficult position of holding charter schools accountable to elusive goals at a time when state and district assessment systems are in flux.

While all these issues vary from one district and one charter school to the next, both charter school operators and local school board members are often conflicted about issues of accountability. School board members tend to feel more comfortable holding charter schools fiscally (as opposed to academically) accountable, and charter school operators often resist any effort to be held accountable to anyone other than the parents and community constituents they serve. Furthermore, some school boards find themselves under intense pressure to renew charters for schools that have garnered a lot of support from their local communities or from state charter advocates, regardless of the student outcomes the schools have shown.

Claim 2: Autonomy and Empowerment

The theory of charter school reform tells us that, in exchange for greater accountability, charter schools are granted greater autonomy from the rule-based education system. Advocates see this autonomy as a key factor in charter school reform because it empowers educators to do what they think is best for students as opposed to what bureaucrats in the education system demand. In this way, charter schools, cut free from the constraints of the public system, will empower educators to better meet the needs of students.[11]

Autonomy from districts. Certainly, the charter school operators we interviewed stated that several aspects of the public system were constraining. But the degree to which charter schools sought autonomy from their school districts varied tremendously, even within a single district. The range of relationships with local districts extended from some very "dependent" charter schools (usually conversion schools), which had little more autonomy from districts than site-based managed schools, to extremely autonomous "independent" charter schools (mostly start-up schools), which operated almost as their own school districts. In between we found large numbers of schools with varying degrees of autonomy depending on what aspect of their operations we examined.

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*All names of districts and schools have been changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of those we interviewed.

This variability in charter school autonomy stems from the particular needs and demands of the individual charter schools and from the requirements and responsibilities that each school district defines for itself. In reality, while some charter schools want to be autonomous and independent, when trouble, questions, and controversy erupt, they often turn to the school district bureaucracy for help.

We defined levels of charter school autonomy on four measures: support and advice from district personnel, district-level services, alternative (nondistrict) sources of services and support, and hiring and firing of educators. Interestingly enough, many of the more "independent" charter schools in our study tended to function with a great deal of autonomy on the last three of these four measures, but not necessarily on the first. That is, some of the most savvy charter school operators have managed to garner a great deal of support from their districts while at the same time maintaining the ability to pick and choose among the other areas of autonomy, taking what they need and opting out of what they don't.

Empowerment for teachers. In terms of empowering educators by providing greater autonomy, we learned that there are indeed empowering aspects of charter school reform for teachers, although these aspects are not always directly related to the degree of autonomy charter schools have from their school districts. For instance, the fact that many charter schools are small schools and thus often have smaller classes made working conditions deeply satisfying for many teachers in our study. At the same time, the teachers told us that these small schools also make substantial demands on teachers' time and energy that may be difficult to keep up with over many years.

Furthermore, charter school teachers are proud of their commitment to these new schools, which, they say, distinguishes them from their counterparts in more traditional settings. Yet in terms of instructional practices — classroom organization, curriculum, pedagogy, and so on — we found that the majority of charter school teachers employ techniques that they used before coming to these schools. Thus, while charter school teachers enjoy new relationships with colleagues and students, the instructional core remains similar to that in regular public school settings. Of course, there are notable exceptions to this rule among a handful of small, start-up charter schools that have maintained an overarching instructional focus.

With respect to credentialing and union membership — two important areas in which charter schools have potential autonomy from the existing system — charter schools may not represent a radical departure. Although charter schools routinely reserve the right to hire teachers who do not have formal training in education (at least until the new legislative amendments are enacted), teaching credentials are still valued in nearly all the charter schools we studied because they provide the schools with additional status.

Finally, we learned that the appearance of charter schools, at least in California, does not necessarily spell the demise of teacher unions. Instead, we found that, with one exception, conversion schools that were unionized prior to their switch to charter status remained unionized. Teachers in these schools were generally adamant about maintaining their union ties. Conversely, the staffs of start-up schools that had no union presence at their inception did not choose to join unions. In other words, charter school educators place different degrees of value on maintaining autonomy from the union. While some find this autonomy empowering, others are concerned that the lack of protection that a union can provide will prove more disempowering in the end.

Claim 3: Efficiency

Charter schools in most states receive less public funding for actual operations than do the regular public schools, if for no other reason than that most of them — particularly new, start-up charter schools — must pay for their facilities out of their per-pupil operating costs. The ability to operate with less public support is simply assumed by some charter school proponents as proof of how education can be carried out for less money.[12]

The California charter school law is in synch with this claim of greater efficiency because there are pockets of public funds, including capital funding, that charter schools are not necessarily entitled to. Moreover, as mentioned above, the California law stipulates that charter schools will receive funding equal to the "base revenue limit" per pupil for the district in which they are located, plus some state and federal categorical funds for eligible students.

Public funds. Because public funding for all California charter schools (with a few exceptions) is funneled through local school districts, the actual amount of money the schools receive — like virtually every other aspect of this reform — is highly dependent on the local district context. In other words, much of what charter schools receive from their local districts depends on the relationship between the charter school and the district, on the political savvy of the charter directors, and on district policies about what the charter schools deserve.

Dependent charter schools are typically funded in the same manner and at the same level that they were before they became charter schools. Independent charter schools, both conversion and start-up schools, have entered into entirely new funding agreements with their districts. Through this negotiation process they may reach an agreement with the district to receive a higher base revenue limit than they would have received otherwise or to receive more funds from state categorical programs.

For example, one charter school in our study is receiving a higher base revenue limit than the other charter school in the district because the director applied political pressure to the district administrator in charge of finance. In another instance a charter school principal was able to obtain both an initial start-up grant and a loan from the district because she lobbied the school board and was able to wield political clout in the community.[13]

Thus it is clear that charter schools do receive different amounts of public funding. Nevertheless, charter schools tend to have lower levels of public support, especially in the area of capital funding. This lack of capital funding is an important issue, especially for new start-up charter schools because they do not have a building to begin with. All eight conversion charter schools in our study were allowed to remain in the district-owned buildings that they occupied before going charter; only one school paid any rent for this space. But the start-up charter schools in our study had to locate and rent space. These rents, which ranged from $1 (in a donated building) to $3,000 per month, were paid out of the per-pupil operating budgets — money that other schools could use for daily operating expenses.

Private funds. But public funding is only one part of the balance sheets of charter schools. The need to tap into private sources of funds — either community-based or corporate or foundation money — is great, especially for start-up charter schools. In some schools we studied, as much as 40% of the operating revenue came from private funds. In this way, charter school reform is, in part, a form of privatization of public education. It allows government to pay less per child overall for education.[14]

What makes this reliance on private fund raising particularly problematic is that different charter schools have dramatically different access to such resources. Using connections to get the information, political support, and needed materials from those who have them often becomes the central means by which charter schools obtain what they need. Of course, some schools — particularly those in wealthy communities — have greater access to these resources than others.[15]

Thus we learned that charter schools, depending on their location and access to private resources, use a number of strategies to garner social, political, financial, and material support. Charter schools in wealthier areas are able to obtain more community-based resources, while charter schools in poor communities are often forced to rely on corporate and other external support. In several instances the need to generate funds increased the workload of an already-strapped staff because extra funding came with extra demands that took charter school educators away from developing their vision of a truly community-based school. While this happens to some extent in all charter schools and in regular public schools as well, the problem is exacerbated in the charter schools in poor communities that are struggling to remain fiscally viable.

Leadership. Finally, our study revealed that charter schools are highly dependent on another critical resource: a "visionary" and well-connected leader. In fact, behind 14 of the 17 charter schools we studied was at least one well-connected, strong leader who provided a central catalyst for reform at that site. Although the roles these leaders played in the reform effort varied depending on the school communities they served and on whether the schools were start-up or conversion schools, these leaders proved central to moving charter reform forward.

What struck us as "strong" about these leaders was their ability to draw together diverse local constituencies — parents, community members, and teachers — and to network outside the immediate school community. The charisma, connections, and business savvy of these leaders, particularly the leaders of start-up charter schools, proved to be crucial. The networks these leaders used not only enabled them to gain political support from district officials but also allowed them to tap into resources to aid in the success of their schools. Many business-savvy leaders were also able to use their knowledge of budgets and school finance to maximize both the school's existing resources and those they acquired.

Claim 4: Choice for Parents

As publicly funded schools of choice, charters are said to provide greater educational access to disadvantaged groups that have traditionally had the fewest choices in education. In this way charter school reform is said to empower parents as well as educators.[16]

We have learned from our study that, while charter school reform seems to provide some families increased educational choices, it also gives charter schools greater latitude to choose which parents and students they will accept. Through various mechanisms — such as recruitment and enrollment requirements for children and parents — charter schools have more power than most public schools to shape their educational communities.

These mechanisms often make it more difficult for parents to choose a charter school than it is for them to enroll their children in the nearby public school. And this aspect of charter school operations raises questions about whether the parents served by charter schools in a given community are necessarily those who have had the fewest choices in the past. Our data indicate that powerful self-selection is taking place in many charter schools, in terms of both families choosing schools and schools choosing families.

The process by which charter schools maintain some control over enrollment begins with word-of-mouth recruitment efforts and the networks through which the schools are publicized and information about them is disseminated. Charter schools have the flexibility to target specific communities, whether they are defined by location of residences, racial/ethnic composition, language proficiency, or certain "at-risk" characteristics.

Admissions requirements and processes constitute another way in which charters have more say than other public schools regarding who enrolls. Because California law allows charter schools to establish admission criteria "if applicable," most of the charters in our study had some sort of admissions criteria. These ranged from specifying which students have priority (e.g., siblings, children of staff, and so on) to determining which students (and parents) seem to fit well into the charter and are likely to succeed in that particular educational community.[17]

Furthermore, about three-quarters of the charter schools in California require parents to sign contracts stipulating what is expected of them and of their children.[18] The scope of these contracts varies, although about 40% specify that parents must be involved at the school in various capacities for a certain number of hours per month or per year. Some charter schools also require students to sign contracts regarding appropriate behavior.

These contracts and the control they provide the school in terms of who attends and who is asked to leave are frequently cited as one of the main benefits of charter reform. In 13 of the 17 charter schools we studied, there has been a concerted effort on the part of the educators and involved parents to define what is distinctive about their schools and to identify it in a way that helps prospective families know whether they will be a good "fit."[19]

The issue of who is able to choose a charter school is also affected by transportation. Very few school districts provide transportation to charter schools, and those that do so generally provide it only for students at conversion schools.

Finally, who can choose a charter school depends on the disciplinary requirements for students enrolled and on the expulsion practices employed. We found that, in most of the charter schools we studied, these requirements tended to be more stringent than those in the regular public schools.

The mechanisms that charter schools use to shape their school communities strongly affect who enrolls and who doesn't. Even when charter school operators are seeking a racially diverse student body, the racial makeup of the local community, coupled with the lack of transportation for students, makes it almost impossible to achieve this goal. Although the California charter school legislation states that charter schools should reflect the racial makeup of their school districts, there seems to be little monitoring of this aspect of the law.

In fact, in 10 of the 17 charter schools we studied, at least one racial or ethnic group was over- or underrepresented by 15% or more in comparison with the local districts' racial makeup. In nine of these schools, the percentages were off by more than 15% for two or more racial or ethnic groups.

This finding, combined with data from the state and federal reports cited above,[20] should raise a different set of accountability concerns with regard to charter schools. But perhaps more important than the racial/ethnic balance of the charter schools is the issue of whether or not they will attract the most involved parents.

Claim 5: Infusing Competition

A critical aspect of charter school reform, according to many of its supporters, is that it will infuse more competition into the public education system, forcing all schools to be more responsive to the demands of parental consumers. This claim resonates with broader proposals for market-based reforms, such as vouchers, deregulation, and privatization. The fundamental argument is that competitive markets are more democratic than large government-run bureaucracies.[21]

Our data do not support the argument that charter schools will have a major impact by infusing competition into an otherwise monopolistic public school bureaucracy. Because many of the schools and districts we studied were facing severe overcrowding as a result of an influx of students, the loss of enrollment was not an issue. Instead, in some schools, the issue was which students and parents were leaving the regular public schools to attend charter schools.

In some districts in our study, the impact of charter schools on the nearby public schools was perceived to be negative because of the charters' ability to admit only those students whose parents were willing to sign contracts and to commit a certain number of hours of volunteer time. This meant that the nearby public schools were educating the students who had not been admitted to or had been asked to leave the charter schools. Rather than view this situation as fair competition, the educators in the regular public schools saw the charter schools as having an unfair advantage. Rather than spurring the competitive instincts of these noncharter educators, the perception of an unfair advantage caused them to shrug their shoulders.

Thus we found little evidence that public schools were doing things differently as a result of the increased competition brought on by charter school reform. However, a longitudinal study of some years' duration would be needed to truly assess such an impact.

Claim 6: Models of Innovation

Because charter schools are subject to minimal regulation, it is assumed that they will empower educators to better meet the needs of their students and that charter schools' approach to education will be more innovative. Proponents argue that such innovation, particularly as it relates to teaching and classroom-level change, can be shared with educators in the regular public schools, thereby fostering positive change and reform throughout the education system.[22]

This last claim runs counter to the competition claim because it is difficult to understand how schools that are intended to compete with one another will interact collaboratively. We found that neither effect was playing out in any systematic way in the districts we studied. For the most part, the relationships between the charter schools and the regular public schools in their districts were either nonexistent, benign, or poor. In short, charter schools were not having much of a direct impact of any kind on local public schools.

When we looked for evidence of a positive school-level impact across charter and public schools, educators in both types of schools and in school district offices told us that there was virtually none. We found that there tended to be a lack of communication between the two types of schools anyway, and this was exacerbated when the charter schools operated more independently or had originally been set up to compete with public schools. Rather than being helpful in terms of improving education for all students, this sense of competition created antagonistic relationships between the two kinds of schools. To the extent that charter schools were more innovative in the areas of curriculum and instruction, organization, or use of funds — and some were more innovative in these areas than others — what they were learning was not being shared with the public schools.

In two of the districts we studied, the charter schools had a different kind of impact on the regular public schools. They served as money makers (or potential money makers) for their local school districts by bringing in large numbers of students and their funding from other districts. As much as 15% of this funding was paid to the local districts in the form of overhead (a practice that will be limited by the new amendments). In these cases, the charter schools had a positive impact on the local public schools by generating new revenue that benefited students in all the schools in those districts.

While there is evidence from our study that some of the school districts are changing their operations as a result of working with charter schools[23] — a finding supported by other charter school research[24] — the impact of charter school reform on the broader public system, particularly at the school level, seems limited and isolated.

Conclusion

We have learned that, with few exceptions, the people who work in and send their children to charter schools are incredibly committed to these schools and their purposes. Moreover, we have seen charter schools that have accomplished amazing feats in the face of limited public funding. Yet for all the excitement and sense of accomplishment in these charter schools, when we stepped back to look at the bigger picture of what this reform means to the larger public, we became concerned.

For instance, there was little evidence that charter schools were more accountable for student outcomes. Charter schools were not always more autonomous, and, while some educators were more empowered, this did not often affect what was happening in classrooms. The efficiency claim is tricky because, while many charter schools had fewer (although not the same) public resources, they tended to supplement them to whatever extent they could with private resources. Thus they were not necessarily more efficient, although they were usually more privatized — which often meant that those in wealthy communities had more.

In addition, in many of these districts, the students left behind in the regular public schools were perceived to be more likely to be those with the least-involved and least-outspoken parents or those who exhibited more troublesome behavior. Thus the claim that charter schools would spur competition was weakened by the notion that they enjoyed "unfair advantages." And the claim that charter schools would serve as models of innovation was undermined by the lack of communication between charter schools and regular public schools (not to mention lack of actual classroom-level innovation in charter schools).

Perhaps the only consistent area in which charter schools remain clearly ahead of the pack is the introduction of market forces into education and the privatization of the public education system. Unless charter schools begin living up to some of the assumptions that have so far propelled them, it is time to reassess this magic bullet of school reform. And this time we need to ask harder questions about equity and equal opportunities.

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CPRE Policy Briefs

Reporting on issues in education reform

Graduate School of Education • University of Pennsylvania • RB-22-September 1997

First Lessons: Charter Schools as Learning Communities

by Priscilla Wohlstetter and Noelle C. Griffin

Twenty-eight states, over the past six years, have authorized the creation of charter schools as an alternative form of public education. Charter schools are seen as opportunities to create high-performing learning communities, with improved student performance and other positive results as the goals of these new institutions.

The creation of high-performing learning communities is central to the success of charter schools, but we need to know if these schools, as currently constituted under their enabling legislation, are capable of creating such learning communities. We want to know what elements help to build or to obstruct these learning communities. To answer these questions, Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) researchers became acquainted with the founders, teachers and administrators in 17 charter schools in Boston, Los Angeles and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Charter schools provide, within the public education system, a new governance structure that is freed from most district and state regulations. Charter schools are intended to increase consumer choice within the public education system. And, most importantly, charter schools are meant to encourage innovation in teaching and learning practices in order to improve student performance. A 1995 survey of charter school founders, conducted by the Education Commission of the States, reported that "better teaching and learning for all kids," "running a school according to certain principles and/or philosophy," and "innovation" were the top three reasons for starting a charter school.[1]

Charter schools differ from regular schools in important ways, most notably in their autonomy from state and district regulations and requirements. Charter schools also differ from one another, in that each charter school is governed by its own charter spelling out its particular structure and programs.

The ability of charter schools to get their programs up and running, and to sustain these programs has varied from school to school. The charter schools' impact on student achievement presumably varies as well, but is unclear due to insufficient or inadequate evaluations. Still, charter schools have been in existence long enough to look for lessons from their experiences.

Unlike many recent studies of charter schools that focus on the fiscal, legal and bureaucratic issues they face, this issue of *CPRE Policy Briefs* examines the goals and implementation issues specifically related to teaching and learning. This policy brief summarizes, "Creating and Sustaining Learning Communities: Early Lessons from Charter Schools," a study by Priscilla Wohlstetter and Noelle C. Griffin which explored how learning communities were created and sustained in 17 charter schools in one city in each of three states: in Los Angeles, California; Boston, Massachusetts; and Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota.

This study was based on the assumption that strong learning communities enhance student performance.[2] CPRE researchers conducted focus group discussions with charter school founders, administrators and teachers, and reviewed

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the charter school proposals, demographic and assessment data and other documents for each of the 17 charter schools. This study examined:

- How school missions were developed and translated into classroom practice;
- How charter schools learned from what they were doing; and
- What factors were likely to produce high-quality teaching and learning in charter schools.

The CPRE researchers identified four building blocks used by the charter schools, some more successfully than others, to create and sustain learning communities: the school's mission; the school's instructional program; the school's accountability system; and the school's leadership. The information gathered during this study suggests that certain enabling conditions may contribute to a charter school's effectiveness in creating and sustaining its learning community.

Charter School Building Block: The School Mission

The school mission is the foundation from which everything else in a school is derived. When the mission is clear and specific, a school is better able to translate its mission into practice. In many of the charter schools studied, the mission grew out of strong, passionate feelings about schools and education, and as the schools evolved, the mission helped to sustain the interest, participation and commitment of teachers, parents and students. The mission statement is sometimes used to communicate fundamental beliefs and expectations to job candidates and prospective students.

The prior experience of those involved in drafting the school's mission statement and charter appears to affect the ease with which they made the transition from vision to operational school. Smoother transitions from mission to practice were made by those who had prior instructional and managerial experience in schools. Charter schools converted from pre-existing schools and those connected with national reform efforts had easier times getting started because of their prior experience. Inexperienced founders, regardless of their commitment, had more difficulty proceeding once their charters were approved because of their lack of know-how.

Schools in which staffs solicited input or feedback about their schools' mission statements from key stakeholders—teachers, parents and students — had fewer conflicts later with those stakeholders. The California charter law mandates teacher involvement, the California charter schools in the study generally included more stakeholders in developing their missions.

The 17 charter schools examined by CPRE researchers had remarkably similar themes in their mission statements despite differences in how the statements were developed, the makeup of their student populations, or the levels of schooling provided. These common themes included: preparing students for a changing society in the 21st century; technology preparedness; and consideration of the "whole student" in terms of his or her academic, emotional and social development.

Many of the charter schools in the sample adopted mission statements which were too broad and lacked specificity. Some of these schools faced problems later when they attempted to translate their missions into specific curricular or assessment practices, or to provide staff members with direction about teaching and learning.

Charter School Building Block: The Instructional Program

A high-quality instructional program clearly describes the school's curricula and pedagogy, and details how teachers lead all students to perform at high levels. Few representatives of the char-

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ter schools included in this study, however, described well-articulated and integrated instructional programs or consistent, content-based professional development systems.

The instructional program should follow directly from the school mission. Vague school missions made it more difficult for many of these schools to develop coherent instructional programs. Short time frames for getting instructional programs operational exacerbated the problem, particularly in charter schools that were not conversions of pre-existing district schools.

Many charter school participants expressed a strong desire to create their own instructional programs. The "make versus buy" dilemma was common to many of the schools studied, but because of time constraints, most used curricula developed by educators and reformers outside their schools, or combined curricular pieces from different sources. The majority of schools purchased parts or all of their instructional programs rather than creating them, and they faced challenges in integrating their unique school missions and ideas about education with the off-the-shelf materials. For example, one middle school's mission emphasized an integrated, holistic curriculum with real-world applicability but, early on when they felt the pressure to put a program in place, adopted the "University of Chicago Math" and "Montana Math" programs despite the fact that the curricula contradicted the school's philosophy of not teaching math as a separate subject. Schools that devoted more preparation and effort to finding instructional programs more consistent with their school missions were better able to integrate their mission and instructional program.

About one-third of the charter school staffs created their instructional programs from scratch, often doing so as they went along. This approach was most characteristic of the charter schools in Minnesota where the schools served at-risk or dropout student populations, and tended to be smaller.

The charter schools in this study emphasized some similar instructional approaches. These common characteristics included:

- Low student-to-staff ratios and small class sizes (Class size ranged between ten and twenty students in the three charter schools with more than 1,000 students; in schools of fewer than 100 students, class sizes often included ten or fewer students.)
- Personalized learning, such as developing individualized learning plans for students
- Interdisciplinary approaches that use "real-world" projects
- A focus on integrating the school with the community (Examples include: school-business partnerships, community service requirements for graduation, involvement of parents and other community members as tutors.)

Curriculum decisions sometimes involved broad groups of stakeholders in committees, task forces, grade-level teams or subject-area teams. All the California charter schools in the sample were conversions of school-based management district schools, which may explain why they created formal decision-making structures. Several other charter schools in the sample had no decision-making structures in place when they opened their doors.

The professional culture for educators across the charter schools was an eclectic mix, often characterized by high levels of professionalization and commitment but, at the same time, many instances where teachers seemed to ignore existing professional knowledge and expertise.

Teachers in the charter schools generally expressed a strong sense of collective responsibility for instruction at their schools, regardless of faculty size. They recognized the importance of continuous improvement, open and collective problem-solving, and reflection about classroom practice. Although informal collaboration among teachers on matters of teaching and learning appeared to be common, there were few formal structures for collaboration. Dialogue among teachers was not usually systematic, rather, it depended on individuals' taking the initiative to visit with colleagues.

Underlying certain curriculum decisions made in the charter schools there was often an assumption of expertise: teachers have the expertise; all they need is a good curriculum. At one middle school, for example, after math manipulatives and math games were selected, it was just assumed that teachers would know what was expected without any organized or ongoing training. One elementary school purchased Hirsch's core classical curriculum, but rejected the recommended training.

Few focus group participants reported any consistent system of professional development, either to provide training or ongoing planning time so teachers could gain the knowledge and skills needed to implement the curriculum effectively. When time was set aside for professional development, it tended to be used more for planning and school culture-building than for helping teachers to master new skills related to curriculum and instruction.

- Some of the charter schools that converted from existing public schools were exceptions to this lack of systemic attention paid to professional development. Focus group participants from conversion schools were more likely than those from start-up schools to say that their schools attempted to use professional knowledge in making curricular decisions. One conversion school created a curriculum committee to investigate curricular changes; another conversion school hired a "standards consultant" to inform teachers about national and district standards. Another former school-based management school required staff members to attend professional development retreats on specific curricular changes each semester, then monitored the extent to which the particular curriculum change was implemented in the classrooms.

Charter School Building Block: The Accountability System

One of the basic premises of charter schools is that they should be allowed greater autonomy in exchange for greater accountability for results.[3] A charter school accountability system requires performance standards for judging whether or not the school meets its goals; assessment strategies for evaluating student performance; and consequences—either rewards or sanctions—based on the school's success or failure in meeting its goals.

The accountability requirements of the agencies sponsoring the charter schools in the three states studied, however, were relatively weak. The states required assessment information but rarely required clear performance standards or established consequences. Sponsoring agencies have focused to date more on standards of fiscal management and, to a lesser degree, on general probity and scandal avoidance than on reasonable progress toward schools' meeting their own student goals.[4]

Massachusetts is considered one of the states with the most stringent accountability requirements. Massachusetts charter schools are subject to one-day evaluation site visits, and the success of the academic program is one of three evaluation areas for charter schools. Massachusetts charters are subject to renewal every five years, but it is not evident what level of school performance is satisfactory for renewal, or whether the state can close a school for non-performance.

Charter schools in the three states studied—California, Massachusetts and Minnesota—are generally expected to establish their own performance goals and formal accountability systems, and to seek their approval from the sponsoring agencies. Out of necessity,

Centralized vs. Decentralized Management: A Tale of Two Schools

The experience of many charter schools in this study suggests that finding a balance between centralized and decentralized management is a critical issue. Focus group participants described this as an evolving process during the first few years, and noted it was easier to achieve a satisfactory balance early in a school's life before structures become too entrenched or unwieldy.

When an elementary school first converted to charter school status, school leaders attempted to involve all teachers and staff members, and parents to a certain extent, in every important decision. After three years of total inclusiveness, the participants felt that this process was slowing down their ability to make and implement decisions. They decided that everyone cannot manage every aspect of the school, and agreed to institute some top-down structures so the school could function more effectively.

When a new secondary charter school first opened, the staff attempted to make all decisions by full consensus but found that, in effect, they were not making any decisions at all. In the second year, the faculty shifted in the direction of wanting a school leader and more centralized decision-making structures.

Growth of Charter Schools

- Since 1991, when Minnesota passed the first charter school law, 28 states and the District of Columbia have passed some form of charter school legislation.
- There are nearly 500 charter schools in operation in the United States, the majority of which are elementary schools.
- Federal funding for charter schools increased from $6 million in 1995 to $18 million in 1996 to $51 million in 1997.
- Sixty-three percent of students who attend charter schools nationally are members of minority groups.

many of the charter schools bought standardized testing materials, and focus group participants expressed concern that the assessments were not tailored to their schools' instructional programs. What has emerged is a continuing dispute over standards for student performance: should the performance of charter schools be judged by the relative improvement of their students based on the school's unique mission and goals, or by state performance standards like other public schools? Focus group participants also noted the difficulty in evaluating outcomes related to non-academic goals, such as students' social and emotional development.

The strongest feeling of accountability reported by the focus group participants was to the local school community, particularly to parents and students. None of the schools studied had strong internal accountability systems in place, but many participants said they were working on developing a formal accountability system. In the meantime, these schools used informal progress reports, annual satisfaction surveys and student enrollment as key indicators to measure school effectiveness.

Just as negative consequences of school failure are absent or unclear, so are positive rewards for good performance by a charter school. With one exception, neither charter schools nor their teachers received significant monetary rewards based on performance. More common were "soft" extrinsic rewards, such as faculty appreciation luncheons, recognition in school newsletters, and the like. The rewards of working in a charter school were mentioned more frequently by charter school teachers and administrators; these rewards included professional collaboration, greater control over the school, and other positive working conditions.

Charter School Building Block: School Leadership

School leadership is an important factor in fostering effective teaching and learning. School leaders play multiple roles and often have to balance between responsibilities related to managerial and instructional leadership.

Managerial and instructional responsibilities were divided in some of the charter schools in this study; in other schools one person or group was responsible for both areas. Schools with the greatest autonomy from their districts were more consumed by managerial decisions and day-to-day operational issues, leaving less time to attend to issues of teaching and learning.

Focus group participants reported certain characteristics common among school leaders. Charter school leaders often perceived themselves as having an "outlaw mentality," coming from outside the public school system or having a willingness to fight the status quo in public education. Many charter school leaders shared a sense of entrepreneurship in that they forged linkages with resources outside the district, including professional networks, community partnerships and new service providers. Representatives of the charter schools believed that leadership arose from collaboration between administrators and teachers, from teams of people working toward a common goal.

Individuals involved in the initial design and development of charter schools generally rejected hierarchical structures typical of the public school system and valued a more even distribution of power within the school community. Designing the organizational structure at many of the charter schools studied was an evolutionary process in which participants struggled to find a balance between centralized and decentralized management structures. Desire for total staff inclusiveness in decision-making vied with concern about greater efficiency and more timely action. Very few school leaders had a strong professional understanding of how to balance the process. Many charter school leaders had only teaching and no management experience. Even administrators with previous managerial experience found that running a charter school presented new challenges and demands.

Enabling Conditions

The charter schools examined in this study had varying degrees of success in putting into place their school missions, instructional programs, accountability systems, and effective leadership. The CPRE researchers conducting this study identified three enabling conditions that help to explain this variability: school power and autonomy; support networks and organizations; and supportive parents. These enabling conditions also help to explain how charter schools might become more successful in creating and sustaining learning communities, and what types of outside support might be made available to make charter schools more effective.

Charter School Enabling Condition: School Power and Autonomy

The charter schools with the greatest control over their budgets, personnel, school governance and curriculum were generally better able to create and sustain their learning communities. They used school funds in new ways tailored to specific school needs, including facilities, curricular materials, professional development, or monetary incentives for teachers. Charter schools with the greatest control experimented with decision-making structures and changes in school-year and weekly schedules. They were better able to avail themselves of community opportunities and resources, and to implement innovations in teaching and learning. Because they did not have to obtain district approval of their decisions, these schools seemed able to adopt new curricular programs or respond to problems more quickly.

It might be expected, therefore, that the most successful charter school laws would be those that grant greater autonomy to charter schools. A great deal of autonomy, however, is not necessarily sufficient in and of itself. A strong organizational capacity in support of teaching and learning is needed to make good use of increased autonomy. Schools having weak organizational structures appeared to have more difficulty in capitalizing on their autonomy. Charter schools require the authority to implement curricular and organizational changes, but they also need leaders with the professional background and capacity to harness this power.

State Teaching and Learning Goals for Charter Schools

California

- Improve pupil learning
- Increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning opportunities for pupils identified as academically low-achieving
- Encourage use of different and innovative teaching methods
- Create new professional development opportunities

Massachusetts

- Stimulate the development of innovative programs in education
- Provide opportunities for innovative learning and assessment
- Provide teachers with a way to establish schools having alternative, innovative methods of instruction, school structure and management

Minnesota

- Improve pupil learning
- Increase learning opportunities for pupils
- Encourage use of different and innovative teaching methods
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the school learning program

Charter School Enabling Condition: Support Networks and Organizations

Charter schools received advice and support primarily from national education reform networks and from organizations created specifically to assist charter schools. The national reform networks generally provided help in the areas of curriculum and instruction, often through professional development workshops. The workshops were not usually tailored to charter schools, but served both charter and non-charter schools belonging to the network.

Charter school advocates often operate charter school support organizations that provide a variety of services: workshops; site visits; individual school assistance and assessments; opportunities for charter school staff members to share problems and practices; outreach to the corporate and foundation community; legal research; and policy education about charter school laws and implementation issues. All three states studied had nonprofit resource centers providing such technical assistance to prospective and operating charter schools.

Neither the federal nor state governments in California, Massachusetts and Minnesota, the three states included in this study, provided technical assistance to charter schools, although federal and state policymakers in all three states were supportive of charter schools. States that enacted charter school laws usually established charter school units within their state departments of education. The main purpose of these units was not providing technical assistance, but administering the law, including oversight of the application process, and evaluating implementation of the law and accountability systems. In contrast, Great Britain started its version of charter schools and established an organization for the "grant-maintained" schools at the same time in 1989. This organization assisted schools as they moved to charter status, and provided technical assistance to the schools after they opened.[5]

Charter School Enabling Condition: Supportive Parents

A base of supportive parents facilitates the creation of a charter school and nurtures its ongoing development. Parental interest can be a driving force in inspiring the passion and creating the commitment to start a new school. After all, a group of interested consumers is necessary for a charter school to have students. In many of the charter schools in this study, parents provided a great deal of encouragement and assistance in starting the school. In a few schools, however, parental interest quickly became perceived as parental meddling when parents protested curricular plans or took an active role influencing other school decisions.

Overall, ongoing parental support and involvement was seen by the focus group participants as critical to the success of the charter schools. Parents volunteered for tutoring programs and school activities; participated in training sessions, discussion groups and decision-making structures; donated time to improve facilities; and provided financial support through booster clubs. The schools without this kind of parental support encountered noticeable difficulties.

Conclusion

It is hard work to design and operate a school focused on teaching and learning. Charter school leaders must learn to balance the demands of curricular issues with those associated with financial, organizational and public relations issues.[6] Our focus group discussions with charter school founders, administrators and teachers suggested that the following factors were most likely to support the development of high-quality teaching and learning:

School Mission

- A clear and specific school mission
- Involvement of key stakeholders in developing the school mission

Instructional Program

- A well-articulated and integrated instructional program that supports the school mission
- A sense of collective responsibility among staff members for teaching and learning in the school
- A consistent, content-based professional development program that helps teachers implement the instructional program
- Development of formal structures for staff collaboration and planning
- Orientation toward constant evolution and adaption to changing demands and new information; continual reexamination of practices and methods; ability to make informed changes along the way

Note: At the time this research was conducted, the finding that the federal and state governments in California, Massachusetts and Minnesota did not provide technical assistance to charter schools was accurate. However, since the time this policy brief was written, the situation has changed—all three states do now provide technical assistance or oversight to charter schools.

Accountability System

- Clear performance standards which can be used to determine if the school is meeting its goals
- Assessments of student performance linked to the school's educational goals
- Rewards for schools and teachers based on performance
- Clear consequences for failure of school to perform

School Leadership

- Prior instructional and managerial experience of school founders and leaders
- Ability to cultivate and manage effectively alternative resources, such as national reform networks, management and fiscal experts, the business and social service communities, colleges and universities, consultants in academic standards and assessment, and administrators from the state department of education

School Power and Autonomy

- A high degree of autonomy and control over the school budget, personnel, school governance and curriculum
- A decision-making structure that balances inclusiveness of staff, parents and others with the need for school leaders to make some decisions to maintain efficiency and timeliness

Support Networks and Organizations

- Availability of technical assistance and support in goal-setting, accountability issues, legal requirements, business matters, and curricular and instructional issues

Supportive Parents

- High level of parental support

Some of these factors contributing to high-quality learning communities are within the power of the charter school leaders and staff members. The outlook for charter schools can be further improved by better charter school laws that demand more specificity from applicants and sponsoring agencies, and through the support and assistance of many outside experts and groups. Only when all of these factors are present will charter schools really be able to focus on teaching and learning, and to fulfill their vision of high student achievement

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About the Authors

Priscilla Wohlstetter is a senior research fellow with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and associate professor at the University of Southern California School of Education, where she directs the Center on Educational Governance. She is currently directing a national study of how charter schools create successful learning communities. She has served as principal investigator of several large studies examining the relationship between decentralized management and school performance, and is a recognized expert for her work on school-based management.

Noelle C. Griffin, a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern California, works closely with Priscilla Wohlstetter in researching charter schools and site-based management. She is a research associate of a Danforth Foundation funded project that is examining accountability issues and the creation of learning communities in charter schools, and co-author with Priscilla Wohlstetter of the paper, "Creating and Sustaining Learning Communities: Early Lessons from Charter Schools," presented at the American Educational Research Association in 1997.

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More on the Subject

Copies of Priscilla Wohlstetter and Noelle Griffin's full-length report, "Creating and Sustaining Learning Communities: Early Lessons from Charter Schools" will be published as a *CPRE Occasional Paper* in Fall 1997; the cost is $5.00. To obtain copies, write to CPRE at the address provided in the box to the right.

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Diane Massell, Michael Kirst, and Margaret Hoppe (No. RR-037, April 1997) $10

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(No. RR-036, March 1996) $5

Standards-based reforms and increased professional development focused on content have helped to improve schooling and boost student achievement. But policymaking still suffers from unrealistic expectations, too much emphasis on structural change, and not enough attention to factors directly linked to student achievement. This summary attempts to highlight promising strategies and policy initiatives while helping policymakers avoid past pitfalls. The report addresses topics including standards-based reform, restructuring, policy and classroom practice, capacity, school finance, and educational productivity.

Teacher Professional Development Profiles, a product of CPRE's 50-state study on professional development, are available through the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Designed to provide an information base for state policymakers interested in improving teacher learning opportunities, these profiles are useful for stimulating discussion about professional development. Please call 215-573-0700, x0 for pricing information.

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CHARTER SCHOOLS

Serving Disadvantaged Youth[1]

BRUNO V. MANNO
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
GREGG VANOUREK
YALE UNIVERSITY
CHESTER E. FINN, JR.
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Manhattan Institute

In many large American cities, one can find some exceptionally effective public schools in which disadvantaged youngsters are learning and being well prepared for work, citizenship, and higher education. But in far too many urban centers—despite the best intentions of educators and others in the community—the educational outcomes for most students are abysmal. Many of these schools are, in the words of U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley (1994), places that "should never be called schools at all" (p. 1).

Who attends urban public schools? One out of four U.S. school children—11 million youngsters. Thirty-five percent of them come from poor families; 43% are members of minority groups. (*Education Week*, 1998, p. 6).

What are these young people learning? After extensive analysis, *Education Week* (1998) concluded that "most 4th graders who live in U.S. cities can't read and understand a simple children's book, and most 8th graders can't use arithmetic to solve a practical problem" (p. 10). Slightly more than half of big-city students do not graduate from high school in 4 years. Sixty-three percent of 4th grade students in non-urban schools reach the "basic" level in reading, compared to 43% of students in urban schools and only 23% of students in high-poverty urban schools. Moreover, the longer urban children remain in school, the wider the performance gap grows between them and youngsters who study elsewhere. The editors of *Education Week* (1998) comment, "Somehow, simply being in an urban school seems to drag down performance" (p. 10).

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From Bruno V. Manno, Gregg Vanourek, and Chester E. Finn Jr. "Charter Schools: Serving Disadvantaged Youth," *Education and Urban Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, August 1999, pp. 429-445. ©1999 by Corwin Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Corwin Press, Inc.

This systemic failure of urban education has evoked widely differing responses from would-be reformers. "Inside the system" reform efforts lead many urban superintendents to engage in what University of Virginia political scientist Frederick Hess (1999) calls policy churn: "hyperactive reform agendas [where] . . . the sheer amount of activity—the fact that reform is the status quo—impedes the ability of any particular reform to have a lasting effect" (pp. 158, 178). Studying 57 urban districts, he found that, between 1992 and 1995, the average school system implemented 11.4 different proposals for change.

On the urban school governance front, the urgent need to shake up the status quo has spurred some states and local officials to undertake seemingly bold actions. (These efforts still leave in place many elements of the present urban school system.) These initiatives include district-led reconstitutions of failed schools (e.g., San Francisco); state takeovers of troubled districts (e.g., Cleveland, Newark, Patterson, Jersey City); placing school systems under the control of specially created boards (e.g., District of Columbia, Baltimore) or under the control of mayors (e.g., Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago); and hiring noneducators to manage the school system (e.g., Seattle, San Diego).

Other strategies rely on changing the system through market-based principles of competition and choice. These include charter schools; contracting with for-profit and nonprofit providers to offer different school and after-school services; and public and private voucher (or scholarship) programs.

Vouchers are the most controversial of these reform strategies, but charter schools are the liveliest. Before these unconventional public schools came into the spotlight in the mid-1990s, education reform in the United States was stalemated by politics and hobbled by most people's inability to imagine anything very different from the schools they had attended decades earlier. Today, there are over 1,500 charter schools in 33 states and the District of Columbia; the number is growing rapidly every year (Center for Education Reform, 1999). According to data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (1998), charter schools tend to be an urban phenomenon: 51% are located in large cities or on the fringe of a large city (with another 27% in midsize cities or their fringes). More than 25% of charter schools are in large cities, compared with 15% of regular public schools.

To date, 37 states have passed charter legislation (although not all charter laws are similar). Oregon and Oklahoma enacted charter laws in mid-1999, and Idaho, Missouri, New York, and Virginia all did so in 1998 (Center for Education Reform, 1999). The charter movement has bipartisan support and wide appeal.

WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?

The first article in this issue presents a primer on the definition, history, and basic concept of charter schools. In this article, we add a few comments and explain why we believe that the charter movement is so promising for transforming U.S. public education, particularly in urban areas.

A charter school is an independent public school of choice, freed from rules but accountable for results. It is an example of a new education species, a hybrid with important similarities to traditional public schools, some of the prized attributes of private schools, and crucial differences from both. As a public school, a charter school is open to all who wish to attend it without regard to race, religion, or academic ability; paid for with tax dollars (no tuition charges); and accountable for its results to an authoritative public body such as a state or local school board and to those who enroll and teach in it.

Charter schools are also different from standard-issue public schools. Most can be distinguished by five features:

- They can be created by almost anyone.
- They are exempt from most state and local regulations, essentially autonomous in their operations.
- They are attended by youngsters whose families choose them.
- They are staffed by educators who are also there by choice.
- They are liable to be closed for not producing satisfactory results.

Charter schools resemble private schools in two important particulars. First, they are independent. Although answerable to outside authorities for their results (far more than most private schools), they are free to produce those results as they think best. They are self-governing institutions. Like private schools, they have wide-ranging control over their own curriculum, instruction, staffing, budget, internal organization, calendar, schedule, and much more. Second, these are schools of choice. No one is assigned against his or her will to attend or teach in a charter school. Parents select them for their children, much as they would a private school.

We think of charters as a way of reinventing public education. Traditionally, Americans have defined a public school as any school run by the government, managed by a superintendent and school board, staffed by public employees, and operated within a public-sector bureaucracy. "Public school" in this familiar sense is not very different from "public library," "public park," or "public housing" project.

We offer a different definition: A public school is any school that is open to the public, paid for by the public, and accountable to public authorities for its results. So long as it satisfies those three criteria, it is a public school. It need not be run by government. Indeed, it does not matter—for purposes of its "publicness"—who runs it, how it is staffed, or what its students do between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. on Tuesdays. Charter schools are part of a bigger idea: reinvented public education in which elected and appointed officials play a strategic rather than a functional role and the public supports public schooling without governmental provision of schools.

The reality sometimes falls short of the theory, and the fact that charter schools entail such a profound rethinking of public education means that they have attracted many critics. The evidence, moreover, is not yet conclusive. The charter movement is still young, and the jury is still out. There are reams of data, but the most important data—concerning academic achievement—are still spotty.

Unfortunately, much of what is known about charter schools is clouded by misperceptions. How can we separate the reality from the theory, the data from the ideology, and the record from the hearsay? In our multiyear study in which we visited 100 charter schools, interviewed over 1,000 people affiliated with those schools, and surveyed nearly 5,000 students, 3,000 parents, and 500 teachers, we encountered innumerable charges and allegations against charter schools. Three in particular concern disadvantaged youth:

- Allegation # 1: Charter schools "cream" the most fortunate kids and leave the neediest behind.
- Allegation # 2: Charter schools do not adequately serve disabled children.
- Allegation # 3: Charter schools balkanize American society and weaken the principal institution that knits us together.

We address each of these allegations in turn.

Allegation # 1: Charter schools "cream" the most fortunate kids and leave the neediest behind. They are elitist academies with subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) screening mechanisms to discourage the enrollment of children they deem undesirable (e.g., low-achievers, discipline problems).

Critics predicted that charter schools would gain special advantage from an "uneven playing field" by enrolling children from well-off and motivated families. Dire warnings were voiced that these new schools would "cream" the most fortunate students from regular public schools. This has not happened. In fact, many charter schools attract youngsters with more problems and deficits than the conventional schools to which they are compared. These new schools supply havens for children who were struggling in (or had dropped out of) their previous schools and for families alienated by the system.

A hefty fraction of charter pupils would not otherwise be enrolled in any form of public education. According to Hudson Institute data (Vanourek, Manno, Finn, & Bierlein, 1997), 19% of students enrolled in charter schools in 1996-1997 had not been under the public education umbrella the prior year: 11% attended private schools, 3% were home-schooled, and 5% had dropped out. Another 17% had not attended any U.S. school because they were too young, were recent immigrants, and so forth (p. 8). Charter schools are introducing some people to public education for the first time and bringing others back for a second chance.

Table 1 uses data from two sources to demonstrate that between 37% and 41% of charter students come from low-income families, almost identical to the poverty rate among regular public school pupils. (RPP, 1999, pp. 30-39; Vanourek, Manno, Finn, & Bierlein, 1997, p. 2) About half of charter pupils belong to minority groups (compared to 41.3% in conventional schools). Ten percent to 13% have limited English proficiency (compared to 10.7% in regular schools), and between 8% and 13% are special education students (compared to 11%).

In the aggregate, charter schools are serving at least their "share" of disadvantaged youth. That should not be surprising. According to the U.S. Department of Education charter school study, 26% of U.S. charter schools report that "serving a special population" was one of the primary reasons for their founding, with one fifth of these schools saying it was their most important motivation (RPP, 1999, p. 42). That is exactly what many charters are doing. The federal study reported in 1998 that "almost all the children in a significant number of charter schools are minorities, economically dis-

Table 1

Percentage of At-Risk Youth in Charter Schools and Regular Schools[a]

	All Public School Students 1994-95/1996-97	*Charter Students (Federal Sample) 1997-98*	*CharterStudents (Hudson Sample) 1996-97*
Eligible for federal lunch program	37.6	36.7	40.5
Minorities	41.3	48.2	49.6
Limited English	10.7	10.1	13.1
Special Education	11.2	8.3	12.6[b]

a. Federal subsidized lunch program eligibility and Limited English Proficiency data in the first column (All Public School Students) are from 1994-95. Minority and special education data in that column are from 1996-97.

b. The Hudson special education figure is the sum of the number of students (as reported by their schools) who have a formal IEP at their charter schools, the number who do not now have an IEP but probably would have at conventional public schools, and the number of other students with serious learning impediments.

advantaged, or students with disabilities. We estimate that approximately one fifth of charter schools may serve such a particular student population. At least 32 charter schools serve more than two-thirds African American students, 13 serve more than two-thirds Native American children, 22 have more than two-thirds Hispanic students, and eight serve more than 50% students with disabilities" (RPP, p. 74).

Some states encourage—or even compel—charter schools to serve at-risk children. About a dozen states have statutes that directly address such children's needs. Missouri's charter law, for example, requires that each sponsor grant at least one third of its charters to schools targeting dropouts or at-risk students. In Texas, there is a much looser cap on the number of "at-risk charters" than on other kinds.

The 1999 federal study states, "Our data contain no evidence to support the concern that charter schools disproportionately serve white and economically advantaged students" (RPP, p. 2). But how well are they serving these children? Although hard achievement data are sparse, there seems little doubt in charter students' minds that they are doing better academically. Table 2 contains data from the Hudson Institute survey (Vanourek, Manno, Finn, & Bierlein, 1997, p. 3) showing that the academic success that students report for themselves crosses racial and ethnic lines. For example,

Table 2
Students' Rating of Their Performance (by Race/Ethnicity); Hudson Institute Study (Percentages)

	Excellent	*Good*	*Average*	*Poor*	*Failing*
All Students					
Previous School	16.0	26.7	26.3	13.3	10.3
Current Charter School	20.9	41.2	24.4	5.3	1.8
Change	+ 4.9	+14.5	-1.9	-8.0	-8.5
White					
Previous School	19.0	27.6	24.8	12.7	10.0
Current Charter School	23.4	43.2	22.2	4.6	1.4
Change	+4.4	+15.6	-2.6	-8.1	-8.6
African American					
Previous School	12.5	22.7	28.0	14.9	10.2
Current Charter School	20.2	38.4	24.0	5.7	2.5
Change	+7.7	+15.7	-4.0	-9.2	-7.7
Hispanic					
Previous School	12.2	25.3	27.1	14.1	12.8
Current Charter School	18.6	40.7	26.2	7.0	1.8
Change	+6.4	+15.4	-0.9	-7.1	-11.0
Asian					
Previous School	13.3	28.7	26.7	12.7	15.3
Current Charter School	18.0	40.0	29.3	6.0	2.0
Change	+4.7	+11.3	+2.6	-6.7	-13.3
Native American					
Previous School	14.6	29.5	36.6	10.9	5.3
Current Charter School	15.4	39.9	35.1	5.3	1.0
Change	+0.8	+10.4	-1.5	-5.6	-4.3

with the change to charter schools the number of students reporting that they are doing "excellent" or "good" work rose 20% for White students, 23% for African American students, 22% for Hispanic students, 16% for Asian students, and 11% for Native American students.

The same trend is evident when the data are broken down by income level. In fact, self-reported performance gains are most significant among low-income children. (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, forthcoming)

Allegation # 2: Charter schools do not adequately serve disabled children. Some disregard federal and state special education statutes. Some do not have the staff or resources to operate a quality special education program. Others attempt to deter the disabled from enrolling.

We have visited some charter schools that seem not to know how to handle disabled students, and some that are ill-prepared for youngsters with severe handicaps or esoteric needs. Undoubtedly, a few schools have hinted to families that their disabled children might be better served elsewhere. But surely that is true. Just as parents of nondisabled youngsters must be clear-eyed about what a particular charter school will and will not do for their child—it might not, for example, allow him to play varsity football or learn Japanese—so too should parents of disabled children be careful school shoppers. If they want the full panoply of government-imposed procedures and services, they may be happier elsewhere. If their child has a disability that requires a particular treatment, a given school—charter or otherwise—may or may not be the best place to obtain it.

Some charter schools fill particular niches for disabled youngsters. The Metro Deaf Charter School in Minnesota enrolls only deaf students in grades K-6 and is nationally regarded as a model for the education of hearing-impaired pupils. American Sign Language is taught as the primary language and English as a second language. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, Community Day Charter School offers all of its students an "inclusive educational program" with no tracks or "individual education plans" (IEPs). After pupil evaluations, parents are told their legal rights and then invited to waive conventional IEPs in favor of the school's ubiquitous "student services agreement." The school thus offers a unique education program to every child. Disabled youngsters are not labeled or made to feel different.

Charter schools are popular with those parents of disabled youngsters who have sought them out, often because such families want something distinct from the cumbersome procedures of conventional "special" education. In the Hudson Institute survey (Vanourek, Manno, Finn, & Bierlein, 1997), among the parents who indicated that their children have disabilities or other special needs, two thirds reported that their charter school's curriculum and teaching are better than those of the school their child would otherwise be attending (p. 5).

The 1999 federal charter study reports that "in most states, the percentage of students with disabilities in charter schools was similar to the percentage of students with disabilities in all public schools in those states" (RPP, p. 36). A report on special education commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education says that, "In contrast to concern expressed by disability advocates that charter schools may exclude students with disabilities, students with disabilities are not greatly under-enrolled in charter schools. In fact, rather than excluding students with disabilities, many charter schools specifically targeted these students" (Fiore, Warren, and Cashman, 1999a, p. 15). (See also Fiore, Warren, & Cashman, 1999b)

Some persist in their claim that charters neglect the disabled. In 1997 testimony before a Congressional committee, Tim Sindelar (an attorney with the Disability Law Center in Boston) alleged "a pattern, in Massachusetts, of significant problems with admissions to charter schools and in delivery of appropriate services for children who are admitted" (Sindelar, 1997, p. 1). Charter critic Richard Rothstein (1998) argues that "special education presents another 'creaming' danger. . . . [A] charter school could effectively limit special education obligations by recruitment and counseling policies that might formally meet requirements but effectively discourage special education enrollment" (Rothstein, p. 55). Nancy Zollers of Boston College's School of Education alleges that for-profit charter schools in Massachusetts "have done a decent job of including students with mild disabilities, [but] . . . have engaged in a pattern of disregard and often blatant hostility toward students with more complicated behavioral and cognitive disabilities. The source of this pattern is . . . the profit motive" (Zollers & Ramanathan, 1998, p. 298). People on the front lines of the charter movement in Massachusetts say such assertions are groundless. As one school head wrote to the *Phi Delta Kappan* (1999) in response to the Zollers and Ramanathan article, "The facts about our school were contorted, distorted, stretched, twisted, and, in some cases, simply fabricated" (p. 626).

We acknowledge that some charter schools may not meet all their students' special needs. That this situation needs fixing does not, however, mean that greater regulatory zeal is the proper remedy. A better solution is to make sure before issuing a charter that the school has addressed this issue in a reasonable way—that it has the staff necessary to do what it says it will do and no one is denied admission because of disability. That does not mean every charter school must accommodate every need of every disabled child.

Regular public schools don't do that, either; they may well send a youngster with particular disabilities to a school across town that is better suited to that child's needs.

This allegation also cuts in two directions: Many district schools do not adequately serve children with disabilities. For example, the *Washington Post* reported in July 1998 that the District of Columbia's special education program is "in disarray," with thousands of disabled children on long (and illegal) waiting lists, backlogs for hearings reaching almost a thousand youngsters, many special education students being sent to private schools, and soaring program costs (Struck & Strauss, 1998a, 1998b). Zollers also concedes that "public schools have not had a good track record with children with behavioral needs" (Zollers & Ramanathan, 1998, p, 302).

The legitimate special education issue is not whether charters are adequately serving disabled youngsters, but whether they are able to serve them differently than conventional schools. The federal government's answer so far is a resounding "no." Even as one unit of the U.S. Department of Education sponsors studies showing that disabled children are well represented and satisfactorily served by today's diverse charter schools, another branch seeks to standardize those schools. According to new regulations issued in March 1999, charter schools must serve children with disabilities in the same manner as conventional schools, regardless of whether the charter receives the requisite funds (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Charter schools are meant to be different, and we can see no reason why this is not just as true for special education. To insist that they model themselves on conventional schools in their treatment of disabled youngsters is akin to saying that every hospital must perform every operation in exactly the same way. If so, there is not much point in having charter schools, at least not for youngsters with disabilities.

Allegation # 3: Charter schools balkanize American society and weaken the principal institution that knits us together. Paul Gillis, president of the Virginia NAACP, said this of charter schools: "We're not going to sit idly by and see our school systems wrecked. From all that we can see . . . these charter schools are hell-bent on taking us back to the 1950s and '60s and beyond." Speaking to Old Dominion legislators just before they voted on a charter bill, Gillis warned, "We're going to watch your vote. If you vote against us, we're going to come after you" (Cienski, 1997, p. A5). The bill passed the third time, though Virginia has one of the country's weaker charter laws.

Do charter schools invite segregation? Most, if oversubscribed, are required to use a lottery or other random method to admit students, but the nature of some schools and neighborhoods is such that they attract members of specific ethnic or affinity groups. When a school's founders are Hispanic community activists, the surrounding community is almost entirely Hispanic, and the school's mission stresses instruction in Spanish, is it surprising that 95% of its applicants are Hispanic?

When does specialization become balkanization? This is an enduring issue in discussions about the rise and future of the "common school," which Boston University's Charles Glenn (1988) has called "the most powerful possible means of forming the attitudes, loyalties, and beliefs of the next generation and thus of 'molding citizens' to a common pattern" (p. 236).

Consider Sankofa Shule, one of Michigan's several Afrocentric charter schools. This unconventional institution observes African Independence Day and Malcolm X Remembrance Day instead of traditional holidays, and its daily "affirmation" (recited by the entire school) begins, "I pledge to my African nation . . . ." (Toch, 1998, p. 46). The District of Columbia's much-publicized Marcus Garvey Charter School, before it was closed in 1998, enrolled only Black children—surely a result of its unabashed Afrocentrism. The faculty, board, and students at the A.G.B.U. Alex and Marie Manoogian Charter School in Southfield, Michigan are almost all Armenian. It was a private Armenian church school before it received a charter (Toch, 1998, 46). The N.F.L.-Y.E.T. Academy in South Phoenix is almost completely Hispanic, as is the Raul Yzaguirre Charter School in Houston. We have also encountered Native American charter schools, schools attended primarily by Mormons, a school comprised largely of Iraqi/Muslim farmers, even an Amish charter in Kansas.

Table 3 shows that, when it comes to race, charter schools as a group are at least as well integrated as regular public schools. (RPP, 1999, p. 30)

State data vary. Charters in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Florida, and Texas enroll a much lower percentage of White students than their public school counterparts, whereas Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Texas charters enroll higher percentages of Hispanic students. In Alaska, California, Colorado, and Georgia, the fraction of charter students who are White is larger than in the state's public school system as a whole. The federal study also found that 72% of charter schools are not "racially distinct" from their surrounding school district, that 16% have a much higher percentage of non-White students than their surrounding district, and that only 12% of charter schools have a much lower percentage of non-White students than the district. The federal analysts found "no evidence that charter schools disproportionately serve white and economically

Table 3
Estimated Percentages of Enrollment in Charter Schools (1997-98) and All Public Schools in the Twenty-four Charter States (1996-97) by Racial/Ethnic Category

Racial Categories	*Percentage of Students Enrolled in Charter School Sample (1997-1998)*	*Percentage of Students Enrolled in All Public Schools in 24 Charter States (1996-1997)*
White, not of Hispanic origin	51.8	58.7
Black, not of Hispanic origin	19.0	16.8
Hispanic	20.6	19.3
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.7	4.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	3.8	1.0
Other	1.1	N/A

advantaged students. . . . [C]harter schools generally mirror the state's racial composition" of students in all public schools" (RPP, 1999, pp. 2, 30-32).

The "balkanization" charge must also contend with the fact that some charter schools are designed for specific sorts of children. The Chicago Preparatory High School serves youngsters who struggle with substance abuse. The Lowell Middlesex Academy in Massachusetts specializes in educating high school dropouts. There are also charters focused on teaching the arts, technology, the environment, automotive engineering, and other specialties, both mainstream and offbeat. Each tends to attract a distinctive clientele, self-selected to be sure, but invariably less "diverse" than a random cross-section of the local population.

Is this good or bad? One's conclusion must hinge on whether one is more taken with schools that have internal coherence of program and community combined with fairly homogeneous demographics, or with schools that boast a rainbow of students but do not engage any particular community or feature a coherent education plan. The occasional school manages both, but if one must pick, which approach does the country more good?

The chartering process contains some built-in safeguards against divisive schools. First is the requirement that the school admit anyone who applies (or, if oversubscribed, use random selection) and not discriminate on grounds of race, ethnicity, religion, etc. Another is the due diligence that responsible sponsors perform before issuing (or renewing) a charter. Public money should not flow to schools that preach segregation, racial superiority, or hatred, even if there is a "market" for such things.

For those unsatisfied by these inherent mechanisms, additional steps can be taken to enlist charter schools in the quest for racial diversity. But these typically cause problems of their own. North Carolina charters are under attack for enrolling too many minority children. The state requires that charter schools reflect the "racial and ethnic composition" of their communities. Healthy Start Academy in Durham does not. Under the rules, it is supposed to have 55% White students, but in reality only two of its 168 pupils were White at the end of Year 1. Yet, its kindergartners boosted their scores from the 42nd to the 99th percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Its second graders lifted their scores from the 34th percentile to the 75th. Should this school be punished because it has attracted mostly African-American students and served them well?

Indeed, North Carolina's minority families have flocked to charter schools. Over half (53.1%) of the students enrolled in North Carolina charter schools are black, compared to 30.8% in district schools, with 13 of the 34 charter schools operating in 1997-1998 having enrollments more than 85% Black (PRR, 1999, p. 33). Thus, thriving schools like Healthy Start may be in danger of being shut down.

But Vernon Robinson, President of the North Carolina Education Reform Foundation and champion of minority youth, notes that this school neither discriminates in its admissions nor teaches Afrocentrism in its classrooms, and that it has advertised for pupils in churches and newspapers in White areas. He is quoted in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial (1998): "We must decide whether the desire of parents and children to learn should take precedence over the experts and their quest for diversity. . . . At some point, we must let our people go to the schools they want to attend rather than where someone else wants them to go" (p. A14). In his concurring opinion in the school desegregation case Missouri v. Jenkins (1995), Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas wrote: "It never ceases to amaze me that the courts are so willing to assume that anything that is predominantly black must be inferior. . . . The Constitution does not prevent individuals from choosing to live together, to work together, or to send their children to school together, so long as the State does not interfere with their choices on the basis of race"(Missouri v. Jenkins, 1995).

Instead of government-style enforcement of racial balance, a market-based alternative would leave it to people's good judgment to set checks and balances on charter schools. This approach, most evident in Arizona, assumes that there will not be much demand for separatist schools. An effective way to help such a marketplace police itself is to make it more transparent, providing maximum information to consumers. When people see that a given school is divisive, most will shun it.

Today we find a hodgepodge of approaches to the prevention of balkanization: a few charter laws that seek to enforce "acceptable" demographics, some sponsors that are conscientious about ensuring equity and diversity in charter schools, and some locations where charters are freely given and the antidote to balkanization is the marketplace. We believe that the second and third options are preferable. The marketplace will usually do a decent job, but charter sponsors should also be vigilant. By setting clear and serious boundary conditions for schools before approving them, sponsors can go a long way toward achieving both excellence and equity. We offer six criteria sponsors might use when determining which charter applications to approve:

1. Charter schools must not discriminate against students (or others) on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, or disability.
2. Charter applications that portend racial, religious, or ethnic conflict or division shall not be approved.
3. Charter schools must not preach or practice religion.
4. Charter schools will instruct students on the meaning of the U.S. Constitution and those values that underlie it (e.g., freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law).
5. Charter schools will respect each person's rights, including freedom of speech.
6. As public schools, charter schools will take seriously their responsibilities toward the well-being of their communities.

So long as such conditions are in place before charters are granted—and are then responsibly monitored—the chips should be allowed to fall where they may.

CONCLUSION

In examining the assertions that charter schools do not adequately serve at-risk and disabled youth, it is tempting to look only at the numbers and conclude that the critics are wrong. To get a better sense of the pulse of the charter movement, however, we found it worthwhile to step inside a lot of these schools and get to know their students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

In our quest, we came across many charter schools deeply committed to serving disadvantaged youth. Among these is the Colin Powell Academy, a beacon of hope in the poorest ZIP code in Detroit that serves 200 African American youngsters. This fine school emphasizes character development, curricular basics, and community leadership.

When General Colin Powell visited the school in September 1997, he had this to say about it: "I've been privileged to be knighted by the Queen of England, I've been privileged to receive Medals of Freedom from two Presidents of the United States, Presidents Bush and Clinton. All those awards mean nothing to me compared with having my name associated with this school"(personal notes, September, 1997).

Still, Powell is not the school's greatest hero. That distinction is reserved for its founder, Pastor Ellis Smith of the Jubilee Christian Church in Detroit, who envisioned a neighborhood school "rising out of the ashes and becoming a pillar of strength in a downtrodden community." When asked why he founded the school, he says, "I could hear the apathy and despair from parents who were not satisfied with our traditional public schools, but were not in a position financially to send their child to a private school. To me, this is a 'calling': to make a significant impact on the academic development of urban youth." Smith believes that charter schools' "greatest potential impact is in economically disadvantaged communities."

And the school has had an impact: it boosted fourth graders' scores on the state reading test by 22 points and by 57 points on the state math test. But the true spirit of the school can be discerned by going back to its first week. A water pipe burst days before Colin Powell Academy was scheduled to open in August 1996, flooding the building. It was a charter founder's worst nightmare. Launching the school would be hard enough—hiring and training teachers, completing the paperwork, and attending to thousands of other details—without such a disaster. But everyone pitched in to rescue the school. The flooding prompted an extraordinary round-the-clock community effort to pump and mop and paint. The crisis engaged parents, students, and others from the neighborhood. Some say that local homeless folks guarded the school from vandals while it was being refurbished. If the community had not mustered mops, buckets, sweat, and toil, Colin Powell Academy would not have opened that week. But open it did.

Smith was elated by the strong response to the almost-biblical flood, for it showed him that the community had already embraced this charter school. He remarks that such schools are important because "they empower communities." By giving families and educators the opportunity to create a school with which they choose to affiliate, charter schools impart a sense of control to people, give them status, and make them members of a community that embodies their values and transmits these norms to a new generation.

NOTE

1. Portions of this article have been excerpted from the authors' book, *Charter Schools in Action*, forthcoming in January 2000 from Princeton University Press.

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CHARTER SCHOOLS AND THE LAW:
Emerging Issues

CHARLES J. RUSSO
University of Dayton
JOSEPH D. MASSUCCI
University of Dayton

In 1991, following several years of debate, Minnesota (Nathan, 1996) became the first state to adopt legislation creating charter schools. At present, 36 states have passed laws permitting the creation of charter schools (Schnaiberg, 1999). Yet, despite the rapid growth and development of the approximately 1,200 charter schools that serve up to 300,000 students in 27 states (Schnaiberg, 1999), "information on the legal issues is sparsely scattered" (Wall, 1998) in the educational, legal, and policy literature on charter schools.

In light of the dearth of information on the legal status of charter schools, regardless of whether they are in urban or other settings, we examine legal issues that may impact upon these schools. After a review of the legal definition of a charter school, we briefly consider the results of a study on the impact of charter school laws on urban schools. The next section begins with a review of the threshold question of whether charter schools are public institutions before examining the key constitutional questions that these schools may face. The final part of this section reflects on perhaps the greatest challenge facing charter schools: labor relations and dealing with teachers' unions.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

DEFINED

The charter school movement, which can be placed in the greater context of the school reform movement, is designed to provide charter schools

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with greater institutional autonomy over issues such as curriculum, teaching methods, and day-to-day management of the schools in order to increase student achievement, expand in the educational choices available to children and their families, and encourage continuous improvement in public schools. A charter school is a public school operated by charter or contract between those who form the school, parents, teachers and/or community members who collaboratively determine the school's structure, and the state (Haft, 1998; Nathan, 1996; Wall, 1998). An approved charter school ordinarily receives the average per pupil expenditure of other public schools in the state (Nathan, 1996).

As reflected by a recent case from New Jersey that affirmed the general rule, once a charter school is granted the right to operate, it typically receives a waiver from most state educational laws and regulations (*In re Charter School Application, of Englewood on the Palisades Charter School*, 1999) such as those requiring personnel to be certified and state-mandated collective bargaining. However, charter school laws specify that state, and federal, health, safety, and nondiscrimination statutes cannot be waived (United States Department of Education, 1997). An interesting question that has yet to be adequately addressed by the federal government is the status of children under such far-reaching statutes as ESEA Chapter I, which provides assistance for children who are at-risk, and students in special education placements who are covered by the Disabilities Education Act. Even in the absence of a clear directive from the federal government, it should be clear that to the extent that charter schools are public institutions, they cannot refuse to accept that the children identified under these statutes should retain all of their legal rights if they attend charter schools (Heubert, 1997).

Depending on where it is located, authority to operate a charter school can be granted either by the state department of education or a local board of education. Moreover, a charter school can either be constituted as a separate legal entity or as part of a local school district (United States Department of Education, 1997). In this regard, it is interesting to note that a study by the Department of Education indicates that 56.4% of charter schools were newly created entities, 32.5% were converted public schools, and 11.1% were preexisting private schools (United States Department of Education, 1997).

Charters are generally good for 5 years; Arizona appears to be the only state that breaks this practice, as it grants charters of 15 years (Huffman, 1998). In return for their freedom from most forms of state regulation, charter schools face increased requirements for accountability to the agencies responsible for their operation and can have their charters revoked if they fail to achieve its stated goal. For example, the statute from Massachusetts reads that the "secretary of education may revoke a school's charter if the school has not fulfilled any conditions imposed . . . in connection with the grant of the charter or the school has violated any provision of its charter" (Massachusetts General Laws, 1996). Minnesota's law, on the other hand, contains four specific grounds for which a charter can be revoked: "1) failure to meet the requirements for pupil performance contained in the contract; 2) failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; 3) for violations of law; or 4) other good cause shown" (Minn. Stat. 120.064, sub. 21(b), 1998). To date, there are no reported instances of a charter school having its charter revoked. However, in the only case on record addressing the rejection of an application, an appellate court in Arizona ruled that organizers of a charter school did not have a right to operate the school because its financial report was unacceptable (*Shelby School v. Arizona State Board of Education*, 1998)

An interesting related question that may arise is what would happen to a school if its charter is revoked. To the extent that a charter school is considered a public school, the school would presumably revert to its previous status. Minnesota's statute is instructive; it states that if a charter is not renewed or revoked, "a pupil who attended the school, siblings of the pupil, or another pupil who resides in the same place as the pupil may enroll in the resident district or may submit an application to a nonresident district . . . at any time" (Minn. Stat. 120.064, sub. 22, 1998). Those operating charter schools would be wise to address this potentially troublesome situation given that it could cause children to be without schools.

THE IMPACT OF CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS ON URBAN SYSTEMS

A Policy Analysis for California Education report (Rofes, 1998) offered five reasons to support its finding that charter school laws have had less impact on large urban districts than in other locations. This report indicates that (1) most of the urban districts were experiencing increasing school-aged populations; (2) most of the large urban districts contained only a few charter schools; (3) since charter schools existed in these urban districts from only 2 to 5 years, more time was needed to study their impact; (4)

because of their size and bureaucratic structures, reforming large urban districts presents a greater challenge than in smaller systems; and (5) since several of the urban districts already had restructuring and reform plans in place, they viewed charters as a distraction (Rofes, 1998).

Even if one accepts these findings, the legal issues discussed in this article should be of interest to individuals and groups interested in forming and operating urban charter schools. The legal issues discussed herein should be useful because leaders in prospective charter schools can use them to learn from, and avoid, some of the pitfalls addressed in the cases discussed. At the same time, in order to encourage development of charter schools in districts that need to improve student achievement, advocates and policy makers would be wise to follow the lead of such states as Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin (Rofes, 1998), Colorado (Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann., 22-30.5-109(3), 1998), and Massachusetts (Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 71, 89(i), 1996) by enacting laws that specifically target low-performing urban schools and at-risk children.

LEGAL CHALLENGES

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

As reflected by a recent case from Michigan, a threshold issue for a charter school is whether it is a public school entitled to state funding. In *Council of Organizations and Others for Education about Parochiaid v. Engler* (1997), the Supreme Court of Michigan upheld the constitutionality of the state law that created public academies commonly referred to as charter schools. According to this statute, charter schools are public schools governed by self-selected private boards. Yet, the controversy arose because opponents of the law feared that because it was silent about means of selecting board members, charter schools would not be subject to public control. In the face of this challenge, the court maintained that insofar as the statute permits the State Board of Education to retain formal control over the boards of charter schools, it did not violate language in the state constitution which forbids self-selected private boards from making educational decisions for public schools. In another part of its opinion, the court also decided that since the statute not only prohibits parochial schools from obtaining charters or receiving public funds but also forbids public academies from having organizational or contractual affiliations with religious schools, the law did not violate the state constitution.

In light of *Engler*, lawmakers in other states should be careful to make it clear that charter school legislation comports with the mandates of the state constitution. Moreover, the law should clearly place charter schools under the supervision of the appropriate public body, whether the State Board of Education, a local board, or some other regulatory agency.

The question of who controls a charter school is significant because, depending upon how it is resolved, charter schools can be challenged on two distinct constitutional bases. If a charter school is deemed a public rather than a private school, opponents can challenge its existence on the basis of the Fourteenth Amendment to the extent that they can claim that it may burden children of color and poor students by not providing them with opportunities equal to those students not in charter schools. Second, if a charter school has any connection to a religious organization, then opponents can file suit claiming that it violates the Establishment Clause.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS

EQUAL PROTECTION

As reflected in educational disputes beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution is perhaps the most significant legal tool that has been used in the fight to ensure equal educational opportunities for all. According to the Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment, a state can neither deprive any person of life, liberty, or property (including education) without due process nor deny any person equal protection under the law. Put another way, this means that the government must, as noted below, treat similarly situated people similarly.

In examining equal protection more closely, the more common vehicle when seeking equity in the face of alleged discrimination, the result typically hinges on the level of scrutiny that a court applies. Equal protection requires the government to treat similarly situated individuals similarly. Rather than reject the government's ability to classify persons, equal protection analysis seeks to ensure that such classifications are neither based on impermissible criteria nor are used arbitrarily to burden a group of individuals. Equal protection has nothing to do with the determination of whether a specific individual is properly placed within a classification. Rather, equal protection asks whether a classification is properly created.

The Supreme Court (the Court) has adopted three standards of review in cases involving equal protection. Under the first, the Court will not grant any significant review of legislation used to classify people based on general economic matters. Thus, when dealing with this kind of classification, the Court will ask only if it bears a rational relationship to an end of government not prohibited by the Constitution. As long as another branch of government has such a basis for creating a classification, a court should not invalidate its action. This test gives such a strong presumption of constitutionality to governmental action that the Court only invalidates a law if it lacks a rational relationship to a legitimate governmental interest.

At the other end of the spectrum, under the Strict Scrutiny Test, the Court will not defer to the other branches of government but will independently determine the degree of relationship which the classification bears to a constitutionally compelling end. The Court will not accept every permissible government purpose as sufficient to support a classification under this test; it instead requires the government to show that it is pursuing a compelling or overriding purpose. The Court applies strict scrutiny in reviewing fundamental constitutional rights such as those in the Bill of Rights or when a governmental classification distinguishes between persons based upon the "suspect" classifications of race or national origin. When the government uses a classification based on race or national origin, or a fundamental right, the Court applies strict scrutiny and requires such a classification to be necessary, or narrowly tailored, to achieve a compelling or overriding governmental interest.

The Court has adopted an evolving intermediate standard of review that is not as difficult for the government to meet as the compelling interest test, but which involves less deference to the legislation than does rationality. Under this intermediate measure, courts are not supposed to uphold a classification unless it has a "substantial relationship" to an "important" government interest.

To date, there has only been one reported federal case challenging the creation of a charter school on the basis that it violated equal protection by denying equal educational opportunities to children. In *Villanueva v. Carere* (1996), Latino parents unsuccessfully sought to prevent their school board from closing two public schools and opening a charter school based on their claim that their children would have had to ride buses or cross busy intersections to reach new, overcrowded schools. The federal trial court in Colorado rejected the parents' allegation that since the schools that closed were in their predominantly Latino neighborhood, the charter school law was not only racially discriminatory, but violated equal protection by depriving their children of their right to equal educational opportunities. On appeal, the Tenth Circuit affirmed that the charter school did not create a suspect classification based on ethnicity. More specifically, the court pointed out that the projected enrollment in the charter school served the same approximate percentage of Hispanic students as the districtwide pupil population. As such, the court added that the parents failed to demonstrate either that the law violated equal protection by having a discriminatory intent or effect. Finally, the court was satisfied that the charter school law did not violate equal protection because it was rationally related to the state's legitimate governmental interest of encouraging the use of new approaches in education.

In apparently the only case involving an equal protection challenge under a state constitution, an appellate court in New Jersey upheld the constitutionality of the Charter School Program Act (*In re Charter School Application, of Englewood on the Palisades Charter School*, 1999). The court affirmed that the Act did not violate equal protection even though it created two categories of education programming for students, those in existing schools in the district and those attending charter schools, supported by public funds absent any evidence that pupils in the existing schools would be treated less favorably than their peers in the charter schools. Further, the court was content that the Act did not deny equal protection to students and their parents in the district where the charter school was to be formed even though it was funded from the existing system's budget absent any evidence that per-pupil funding in the district had to decrease in order to maintain the guaranteed level of spending in the charter school or that parents whose children attended existing schools in the district would have paid more taxes than parents whose children went to the charter school.

ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE

In light of the significant amount of litigation surrounding the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which declares that "Congress shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion," it should not be surprising that charter schools may face some opposition. Clearly, charter schools created out of existing public schools are not likely to face the threat of

Establishment Clause litigation. However, where state statutes have not anticipated such challenges, schools formed by private organizations may face litigation.

Several states have taken steps to avoid Establishment Clauses litigation by including clear directives in their charter school laws. For example, California's statute declares that "no charter shall be granted under this part that authorizes the conversion of any private school to a charter school" (California Education Code 74602, 1993). According to Minnesota's law, "A charter school shall be a public, nonsectarian, nonreligious, non home-based school which operates within a public school district" (Minn. Stat. 120.064, sub. 8, 21(b), 22, 1998). Similarly, Massachusetts' statute maintains that "a charter school must be nonsectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations. A sponsor may not authorize a charter school or a program that is affiliated with a nonpublic sectarian school or a religious institution" (Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 71, 89, 1996).

Even with safeguards in place, litigation has begun to surface over religious issues associated with charter schools. It is not surprising that Minnesota, home to the first charter school law, gave rise to the first litigation that raises interesting implications for charter schools. In *Stark v. Independent School District No. 640* (1997), the Eighth Circuit held that a local school district did not violate the Establishment Clause when it permitted a religious group to open, and operate, a public school that accommodated the request of parents by granting them an exemption from state law that allowed them to limit the use of technology in the school.

Porta v. Klagholz (1998) is more typical of the type of litigation that charter schools are likely to face. In *Porta*, a taxpayer filed suit in the federal trial court in New Jersey challenging the constitutionality of the state's charter school law. The plaintiff unsuccessfully sought an injunction on the ground that permitting public funding for two charter schools that were located in church buildings violated the Establishment Clause. In reaching its conclusion, the court pointed out that the statute did not violate the separation of church and state because although the schools were to be located on church premises, not only were all vestiges of religion removed from the school but its purpose and curriculum were completely secular. As such, the court was satisfied that the law passed the widely used *Lemon* test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) applicable in Establishment Clause cases because it had a secular purpose, neither advanced nor inhibited religion, and did not create an excessive entanglement between the state and religion.

LABOR RELATIONS

Perhaps the most significant legal challenge charter schools may face deals with labor relations. Until recently, teachers' unions have had generally unfavorable attitudes toward charter schools (Haft, 1998) in part because they are generally exempt from state bargaining laws (Nathan, 1996). Even so, the existence of charter schools within districts may present serious concerns for local teachers' unions in the future as charter schools may cut into a district's current and future pool of students, which can negatively affect the amount of state per pupil subsidy.

A reduction in funding may erode possibilities for program offerings, personnel, and salaries. Further, charter schools may act as "free agents" vis-à-vis a district's negotiated contract. Depending where it is located, if a local board denies the application for a charter school, the organizers can appeal to the state. If the state reverses a board's denial and grants a charter to organizers, this can have a negative impact on the union's master agreement with the local board by detracting from a union's bargaining power through reduction-in-force and revenue. It is easy to see why union leaders perceive charter schools as significant threats to their existence and may even view these schools as an initial effort aimed at eliminating their organizations altogether. In light of the potential for conflict that a charter school may create in a district, organizers would be well advised to work with administrators and union officials to try to minimize disruptions so that the entire system can set about its important task of educating children.

CONCLUSION

In light of the lack of clear information about how the legal status of charter schools in urban areas differ from their counterparts in other locales, this article has raised a variety of issues that should be instructive to organizers wherever they chose to open a school. We hope that although the legal issues that have arisen have yet to focus directly on urban schools, organizers will be able to avoid problems that their counterparts have had in other locations and will be able to operate successful schools working in harmony with their colleagues in the local public schools.

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Christy Lancaster Dykgraaf
and Shirley Kane Lewis

From Christy Lancaster Dykgraff and Shirley Kane Lewis, "For-Profit Charter Schools: What the Public Needs to Know," *Educational Leadership*, vol. 56, no. 2, October 1998, pp. 51-53. Reprinted with permission from ASCE. All rights reserved.

For-Profit Charter Schools: What the Public Needs to Know

Are for-profit managers of charter schools removing the "public" from public education? A study of 11 schools in western Michigan found cause for concern.

Numerous articles address the topic of charter schools, but the subtopic of for-profit management seldom appears. For-profit corporations that manage charter schools provide millions in dollars of start-up money and receive millions in additional tax-free funds from state and federal governments. As researchers in western Michigan—where corporations hold the reins of the charter movement and for-profit management is an aggressive undertaking—we wanted to learn how this new enterprise is affecting public education.

At the start of the 1997-98 school year, the Grand Rapids metropolitan area had 15 charter schools, 11 of which were managed by for-profit corporations—the Educational Development Corporation, the Leona Group, and Malone Management. Our research looked at these 11 schools and focused on three questions: Do the cost-cutting strategies necessary to achieve a profit affect such areas as transportation, special education, and socioeconomic mix of students? Are there adequate communication links between managers and the stakeholders they serve? Does for-profit management shift ownership of public schools from the public domain to the private?

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Our conclusions proved to be troubling. First, cutting expenses is indeed part of the for-profit strategy, with results in transportation, in special education, and in the socioeconomic mix of students. Second, we concluded that the public likely is not aware of how drastically for-profit management is altering the profile of public education in western Michigan, for no easily accessible source of information is available on the activity of these management groups. Finally, de facto ownership of these 11 schools rests more with their management companies than with the public. In most cases, the bureaucracies the corporations have superimposed over these schools have eradicated two cardinal tenets of the charter movement—the freedom of educators to practice site-based management and innovative teaching methods, and the provision of choice in public education.

Cost-Cutting Strategies

Charter schools receive the same funding as other public schools. However, for-profit managers, one could conjecture, do what they can to enhance profit. We hypothesized that their profit strategy included cutting expenses. Transportation, special education, and the socioeconomic mix of students account for much of the increased cost of education (Molnar, 1996b); therefore we focused our hypothesis on these areas.

Transportation. In 1994 the Michigan legislature passed a law that radically changed the funding of public education in the state. One major effect was to discontinue providing school districts with transportation dollars on the basis of their reported need for transportation of students. Instead, transportation funds now are bundled into the annual per-pupil foundation grant allocated by the state. Charter schools receive the same foundation grant per pupil as all other public schools in their respective districts. During the 1997-98 school year, the foundation grant cap in Michigan for charter schools was $5,924, according to Michigan's State Department of Education Charter Schools Specialist (G. Cass, personal communication, August 19, 1997).

In 1995 the first charter schools managed by for-profit groups in our area opened their doors. Only 1 of the 11 schools studied provides transportation. In effect, these management groups receive funding for a service they don't provide. For the sake of comparison, it is worth noting that in Rockford, a large suburban school district in the Grand Rapids area, transportation costs account for 6 percent of total expenditures, or $325 per student, according to the Assistant Superintendent for Financial Affairs (R. Nyenhuis, personal communication, December 16, 1997).

Special education. We were interested in how many special education students were in the 11 schools and what level of special education they were receiving. Further, we wondered whether these schools were following the pattern of some charter schools in Massachusetts, which tell parents of special education students that only inclusion is available, and if they desire the full spectrum of services their children are legally entitled to, perhaps they should look for a more accommodating school. Often, as a result of convincing dialogue initiated by charter school officials, parents choose to waive their child's right to all or partial entitlements under the law (DiLorenzo, 1997a, p. 4).

In 10 of the 11 schools studied, special education students account for only 3 percent of total enrollment, far below the normal 10 to 13 percent in traditional public schools. Moreover, many special education students in these schools receive only minimal services, specifically, speech therapy. Twenty percent of the special education students who came from other schools legally dropped their special education designation when they enrolled in the schools we studied. Principals reported that some parents do sign legal waivers to relinquish their child's entitlement to all or some special education services. Principal Steve Mattson from Grattan Charter Academy reported that his management group sends out a representative to talk to parents about signing these waivers, a scenario similar to what is occurring in Massachusetts (personal communication, November 11, 1997).

The salient fact to keep in mind is that these for-profit groups receive the full stipend for each student with a special education label even though they do not provide full services. Public schools that provide the full spectrum of services do not receive any more funding than the charter schools for each student designated "special education," according to the Executive Director of Special Education from Rockford, Michigan, Public Schools (M. Polinowski, personal communication, December 20, 1997). Special education, it would appear, is an area of profit for these management groups.

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Socioeconomic considerations. The absence of free busing has sociological ramifications. For students from neighborhoods beyond a charter school, the absence of busing "clearly diminished poor students' choices of schools" (Di Lorenzo, 1997b). Amy Stuart Wells (1997) argues that charter school policymakers should provide students

> free and accessible transportation to charter schools outside their communities, assure these students receive information on their school choices, and guarantee their equal access to charter schools in wealthier areas.

Gary Cass, Michigan's charter schools specialist, estimated that only 10 percent of all charter schools in Michigan bus their students, and he emphasized that no public schools are required to transport students, (personal communication, August 19, 1997). For-profit managers of the schools studied have used this omission in school law to their advantage. Only 1 of the 11 schools transports its students. None of the schools is located in the inner city of Grand Rapids. In fact, the schools are located in middle- to upper-middle-class areas. Eighty-three percent of the students are Caucasian, and only 10 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch.

It appears that this absence of busing hinders many economically deprived inner-city or rural students from choosing the schools in our study. As William Julius Wilson (1997) of Harvard University's School of Social Science has noted, "Poor, urban residents cannot afford cars, and they do not have a network system that supports carpools." These schools purport to offer choice to parents, but real choice for parents means "more than just freedom to walk away from schools they don't like. They also have to be able to get their children into schools they prefer" (Molnar, 1996, p. 158).

It would be valuable in future studies to determine whether "skimming"—with the intent of gleaning a pool of the most easy-to-educate students—is occurring in these charter schools and in others across the country. If so, it could possibly be considered subtle social discrimination. Principal Bill Kirkwood from Knapp Charter Academy told us his school would be opening its middle school wing in fall 1998. When asked if it planned to open with 6th through 8th grades, he said,

> No. We don't want to open up the floodgates because then we'd get all kinds of kids and all kinds of behavior problems. We prefer to bring them up through the ranks. We'll add one grade per year. (personal communication, November 25, 1997)

The other schools in this management group also add one grade a year and give preference to siblings of students already enrolled. Principals in all the schools studied told us their best advertising is word-of-mouth. Sociologically speaking, it appears these management groups have created a closed and perhaps biased system of education.

Public Communication

When we began our investigation, we expected to easily acquire a list of the charter schools in our area under for-profit management. Such was not the case. Both the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Association of Public School Academies indicated they had no information on for-profit charter schools. We then contacted a resource person in charge of disseminating a special report that the governor had mandated to inform the public about Michigan's public schools. When asked whether the report included information about for-profit management of charter schools, the resource person replied, "For profit? That's not something public schools are supposed to make" (K.-S. Chung, personal communication, August 15, 1997). He remained incredulous as we endeavored to explain the existence of the for-profit sector in the state's charter schools.

Finally, we contacted the authorizing university for each charter school in our area. The universities told us which of their charter schools were under for-profit management and supplied us with the name of each management group. The difficulty we encountered acquiring information about what are supposed to be public schools testifies to the need for publicly accessible information about for-profit management.

The Question of Ownership

From the beginning of the charter movement, proponents have declared that at last teachers, parents, and students would be freed from the constraints of public school bureaucracy and able to achieve true innovation and choice. The charter movement would place effective authority within market settings and would be "radically decentralized" (Chubb & Moe, 1990, p. 29). However, we discovered a strong centralized authority imposed over the schools in our study. We question whether, in practice, these schools do not belong to the corporations who manage them rather than to the public.

We discovered an especially strong centralized bureaucracy in six schools managed by the same corporation. This management group uses a generic parent handbook in all its schools and organizes parents into the same committee structure. The calendar is identical at each school, as is the curriculum, except in one school that uses a different math program. All principals stated that their schools use a "back-to-basics" curriculum determined by the management group, and the discipline policy is the same in these schools.

> *Sociologically speaking, it appears these management groups have created a closed and perhaps biased system of education.*

Another notable feature is the similarity in professional background of the schools' principals. All but one had retired after at least 20 years as principals in the Grand Rapids public school system. As a group, they meet regularly and frequently with their management corporations. They also reported that they identically manage their schools according to their corporation's direction.

The power of this particular management group extends beyond curriculum and management to actual ownership of all buildings and equipment. The corporation uses the same blueprint to construct wood-frame buildings, and each individual school board leases the school buildings and equipment from the corporation and the leasing companies it has created. If these schools were to close, the buildings and equipment would apparently revert to the management corporation, which would be free to sell them and keep the proceeds.

Forget individuality. Forget imagination. Forget innovation. What these management corporations have created is a kind of rubber-stamp formula to educate students in the Grand Rapids area. Given the findings of our study, the emergence of for-profit charter schools in western Michigan is cause for concern. Issues related to cost-cutting strategies, communication, and public ownership of the public schools deserve serious attention if these charter schools are to match the expectations and meet the needs of the constituencies they are intended to serve. ■

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Christy Lancaster Dykgraaf is an 8th grade teacher in the Rockford, Michigan, Public Schools, and **Shirley Kane Lewis** is Dean of Curriculum at Aquinas College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. The authors can be reached in care of Christy Dykgraaf, 2419 Elmridge, N.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49544-2366.

For-Profit Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities

The Sordid Side of the Business of Schooling

BY NANCY J. ZOLLERS AND ARUN K. RAMANATHAN

As they strive to make money and fulfill their promise to improve educational outcomes, for-profit charter schools in Massachusetts often ignore special education law and treat students with complicated disabilities as financial liabilities, the authors charge.

Illustration by Karen Stolper

IT'S HARD NOT to be drawn in by the rhetoric. Your public schools are failing. Your children aren't learning. The school system, choked by regulation and held hostage by unions, won't respond to your concerns. We will. We are America's "huge, vibrant, and creative" private sector.[1] Our success is based not on compliance with government regulations or mandates but on creating the best product and attracting the most customers. We will revitalize the public school system with market-based competition. All we ask in return is something as American as free speech — the opportunity to make a profit. Think about it. What do you have to lose? Wouldn't you like to have a choice for your children?

That's the sales pitch. And it's a good one. Across the country, communities are considering turning over their public schools to private businesses. Businesses, always ready to seize an opportunity, especially in a market as potentially lucrative as public education, have been quick to respond.[2] A number of management companies are investing in the business of schooling, and the concept that many of these companies have invested in is the for-profit charter school.

Companies find the charter school formula attractive: a steady flow of public money combined with exemptions from costly government regulations and school board requirements such as collective bargaining. In exchange for this funding and

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NANCY J. ZOLLERS is an assistant professor in the School of Education, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass., where ARUN K. RAMANATHAN is a graduate student.

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freedom, charter schools are expected to fulfill the terms of their charters, which usually have to do with improving student test scores over a fixed number of years.

During the past six months, we have been studying the way that for-profit charter schools in Massachusetts handle special education. Of the state's 33 charter schools, nine are for-profits, giving Massachusetts one of the highest percentages of for-profits in the nation.[3] With more than 5,200 students, these schools have more than half of the entire charter school enrollment in the state. At the time of our study, five of these schools had been in operation for at least two years. This fall four new for-profits opened. Our study focused on the five original for-profit charter schools, though we did review the applications of the new schools and interview a number of prospective parents.

Our interest in the for-profits' special education programs was provoked by reports that substantial numbers of students with disabilities were leaving the five original charter schools and returning to their local public schools. After we analyzed charter school applications, annual reports, and financial statements; interviewed dozens of parents, community members, and school and government officials; and reviewed government documents and memos as well as articles from the popular press and professional journals, a picture emerged of for-profit special education programs that sharply contrasts with the idyllic images of successful "inclusive models" that these companies have presented to the public. While they have done a decent job of including students with mild disabilities, for-profit charter schools in Massachusetts have engaged in a pattern of disregard and often blatant hostility toward students with more complicated behavioral and cognitive disabilities.

The source of this pattern is the very same factor that the companies that manage these schools use to explain their success — the profit motive. As they strive to make money and fulfill their promise to improve educational outcomes, for-profit charter schools often ignore special education law and treat students with more complicated disabilities as financial liabilities. This attitude has been reinforced by a state government that coddles charter schools while singling them out as examples of free-market accountability and innovation. All of this has occurred in the context of what many observers characterize as a "model charter school law."[4]

Company Schools

Three management companies — Sabis International (a Lebanese company and the only foreign entry in the for-profit market), the Edison Project of New York, and Alternative Public Schools (now Beacon Management) of Nashville — were included in the first wave of Massachusetts charters. Beacon manages one charter school in Chelmsford and recently opened the Rising Tide Charter School in Plymouth. Sabis Educational Systems operates the Sabis International School in Springfield and the Somerville Charter School and recently opened the Sabis International School in Foxboro, a regional K-12 charter. The Edison Project currently operates two charter schools: Seven Hills in Worcester and Boston Renaissance. A fourth company, Advantage Schools of Boston, recently opened two regional charter schools, the Abby Kelley Foster Charter School in Worcester and the Mystic Valley Advantage Charter School in Malden/Melrose.

Considering the wide range of curriculum models adopted by nonprofit charter schools in Massachusetts, the curricular approaches adopted by the for-profit schools — especially those operated by Sabis, the Edison Project, and Advantage — are remarkably similar to one another. Each Sabis, Edison, and Advantage school uses a prepackaged curriculum developed by its management company. Each promises more instructional days, improved test scores, intensive instruction, extensive computer usage, and tight classroom discipline.[5]

As for special education, all the for-profits pledge to educate students with disabilities using an "inclusive model" in which students with disabilities learn alongside their nondisabled peers. Their applications for charters contain strong nondiscrimination statements and language welcoming students with disabilities and touting the power of their curriculum models to accommodate students with varying levels of ability.

So far, the for-profits have generated mostly positive reviews. According to the charter schools' self-reports and local press coverage, parent and student satisfaction is higher than in local public schools. The for-profits' waiting lists are crowded with applicants. Their students have achieved remarkable gains on that all-important measure — standardized test scores. After some initial difficulties, the schools maintain that their inclusive models are working and reintegrating back into the mainstream many students who were mistakenly identified as disabled by the public school system. These results appear to confirm that the for-profits are a model for public education.

We do not challenge the for-profits' success at creating popular schools or improving test scores. We do, however, challenge the "success" of their special education programs and, based on that, the contention that they represent a model for public education.

Unwelcome Customers

Each of the original for-profits has a substantially lower percentage of students with disabilities than its local district.[6] Charter school proponents tend to explain away this statistic by arguing that public schools over-identify students with disabilities, that all charter school students are "special," that labeling hurts students' self-esteem, and that charter school inclusion programs can facilitate the removal of the disability label.[7]

This line of argument does not explain our findings. First, these for-profits serve far lower percentages of students with complicated disabilities than do local districts. Second, substantial numbers of students with disabilities, mostly those with more complicated disabilities and expensive needs, have left for-profits and returned to their local districts.

Massachusetts uses a noncategorical system that identifies students with disabilities by the "prototype" level (.1 to .8), based on the amount of time a student spends in the regular classroom. The state's charter school law exempts charter schools from serving students with .5 or higher prototypes, primarily students with severe disabilities who tend to be served in private schools. Even with this exemption, each of these for-profits serves a lower percentage of students in the moderate disability categories (.3 and .4) than do local districts.[8]

As for returning students with disabilities to local districts, the worst offenders are the two Edison schools. According to figures provided to us by the Boston Public Schools (BPS), 21 students with disabilities have left Seven Hills and 40 have left Boston Renaissance over the past three years. To put the Renaissance figure in perspective, BPS reports that during that same period only two students with disabilities left the five nonprofit charter schools in Boston. Since 26 of the 40 Renaissance students left in the 1997-98 school year, it is unlikely that this exodus resulted from start-up problems.

Both Sabis schools have also sent back students. "Sabis called and wanted to send back two .4 kids," reported a Springfield public school administrator. "I said no because they had a .4 program. The next day they called and said these students had new .5 IEPs [individualized education programs] and now we had to serve them." Similarly, the director of special education for Chelmsford, Carol Fredette, reported that 10 students have returned from the Chelmsford charter school. "They've been coming back all year — all grade levels — like a revolving door."

All the special education directors in districts with for-profits reported that charter school personnel were informing parents of students with disabilities that they would be better served in the public schools — a practice known as "counseling out." According to their reports and those of parents, for-profits begin counseling out during the enrollment phase.

Unlike public schools, charter schools have to recruit students (customers). Before Renaissance opened, representatives from the Edison Project canvassed Boston neighborhoods, promoting their model school and promising a safe environment, high standards, and a computer in every classroom and home. The other for-profits engaged in similar promotional campaigns. The responses to their recruitment efforts were dramatic — so dramatic that the schools were forced to conduct enrollment lotteries. Parents who won the lotteries were ecstatic. But once the for-profits began finding students with IEPs among their "winners," some asked parents to drop their children's IEPs and to accept nonbinding "learning contracts" without the procedural safeguards or rights attached to an IEP. Said a Chelmsford charter school administrator, "We don't use IEPs; we tell parents that you have the option of a learning plan. Every kid has one."

A typical example is the case of Blanca Diaz. A grandmother caring for her three grandsons with disabilities, Diaz won the lottery at Seven Hills. She reported that when school officials saw the boys' IEPs, they sent her a letter informing her that two of her grandsons could not be served by Seven Hills. Massachusetts and federal law expressly prohibit charter schools from discriminating on the basis of disability. Further, charter schools are required by law to take any student with a disability who wins the admissions lottery and to implement that student's IEP.[9] According to Diaz, school officials never informed her of her right to enroll her grandsons. It was a week before the start of school, and she had already bought Seven Hills school uniforms for the boys. Assuming she had no choice, Diaz placed the two boys in the local public school.

Parents at the new Abby Kelley Foster Regional Charter School run by the Advantage company have also reported that they were counseled out. Mary Young has two sons, one nondisabled and one with a behavioral disability. Young stated that when her nondisabled son won the lottery and was accepted at the Advantage school, she asked if she could enroll her disabled son. According to Young, school personnel then informed her that "they couldn't discriminate, but they really couldn't deal with this kind of kid" and were "afraid that they'd just kick him out later." Dollie Luchie reported that she received similar treatment when she tried to enroll her significantly disabled daughter in the Advantage school. According to Luchie, school officials sent out a letter informing parents that siblings were automatically accepted. She stated that they quickly accepted her son but, despite her repeated requests for clarification, would not commit to accepting her daughter. The day school opened, she was surprised when a bus from the public school came for her daughter. When Luchie called the public school, they informed her that the charter school had asked for her son's records but not her daughter's.

Other students with disabilities were never even given the opportunity to choose a charter school. Sabis International moved into an existing middle school in Springfield. The building housed two self-contained classrooms of students with moderate disabilities (all of whom were eligible for the charter school), and it had just been remodeled to accommodate their physical needs. A Springfield public school administrator told us that all the students in the school except the students in the self-contained classrooms were informed that they would be welcome in the charter school. The students with disabilities were forced to leave their school.

For-profits have also counseled out students with disabilities after they began having behavioral problems. In the March 1998 *Kappan*, Peggy Farber reported on the case of Kylee Jones, a kindergarten student whom Boston Renaissance authorities attempted to counsel out after he displayed inappropriate behaviors such as tantrums.[10] The parents filed a complaint in Kylee's name with the Office for Civil Rights, and Renaissance lost the complaint. What Farber did not report was that Renaissance had settled two previous complaints, one of which was nearly identical to Kylee's.[11]

After Farber's article was written, another Renaissance parent, Renee Mitchell, filed a nearly identical discrimination complaint against the Edison school. Mitchell stated that, after her child began having behavior problems, he was repeatedly suspended, sent home early, and secluded in a separate classroom without an academic curriculum. Three weeks before the end of the 1997-98 school year, she reported that Renaissance authorities pressured her to place him back in the "failed" public school. Said Mitchell, "I wanted something better for my kid. They promised so much . . . family involvement, special-needs department, high emphasis on reading and math. I thought they would really listen to me. This has been a horrible nightmare."

Linda Alvarado won the lottery at Sabis International for her son Carlos. She reported that after Carlos began having behavioral problems, he was denied services, was repeatedly suspended, and was then placed in what Alvarado called "a holding cell." When Alvarado complained about this treatment, she was told that Sabis was a "semi-private school" and that her son would be better off in the public school. Assuming that she had to leave and after fruitlessly searching for a local Sabis administrator to whom to appeal the school's decision, she called the Sabis owner in Lebanon. "I actually had to call overseas to the owner. It was long, long distance."

In these and other stories parents told us, the pattern is the same. The for-profit charter school refuses to provide required services to a child with a behavioral disability, uses inappropriate disciplinary procedures, segregates the child in a separate "classroom," and eventually attempts to counsel him or her out of the school. The practice of repeatedly suspending a student without attempting to address his or her behavioral needs is, by itself, a crude tactic used to pressure parents to return their children to public schools. Parents who complain are considered troublemakers. Said Jim Caradonio, deputy superintendent of the Worcester public schools, "They have the attitude that you can walk if you don't like it."

According to Kathleen Boundy, attorney and co-director of the Center for Law and Education in Washington, D.C., the practice of counseling out and the crude disciplinary process used by the for-profits in these cases violate federal and state special education law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.[12] The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that public schools provide a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities. Because they are public schools, charter schools cannot reject a student with a disability simply because their program isn't suitable for that student, a requirement called "zero reject."

IDEA also provides parents with extensive procedural rights when school officials want to change their child's placement or initiate disciplinary action. These same rights are also embedded in Massachusetts special education law. When asked about the many reports that Massachusetts for-profits were counseling out students with disabilities, Edward Kirby of the Massachusetts Charter School Office confirmed that for-profit charter schools are "obligated to enroll without discrimination" and to provide necessary services. He also agreed that reports of counseling out could have a chilling effect on future attempts by parents to enroll their children with disabilities in for-profit charter schools.

But the truly disturbing aspect of these for-profits' actions is not their illegality. It is how they first raised and then dashed parents' hopes of providing their children with a better education. That many of these parents were recent immigrants who didn't know their legal rights renders these for-profits' actions even more suspect.

The Resources Myth

Charter school operators often complain that their small size and lack of funding make it difficult for them to serve students with disabilities. In 1995 we conducted a nationwide survey on charter schools and students with disabilities and found that many charter school founders were concerned that special education would bankrupt their schools.[13] Chester Finn, the ideological godfather of the charter school movement, has questioned the cost/benefit ratio of special education and often cited its high cost as a threat to individual charter schools.[14]

Certainly, special education is expensive — in Massachusetts almost twice as expensive as regular education.[15] Because state and federal reimbursements for special education fall far below its actual costs, school districts often strain to find the money to serve students with disabilities — especially students with severe disabilities. It would appear, then, that the fears that Massachusetts charter school operators have expressed about special education breaking their bank might be legitimate. And this, in turn, might lead charter school apologists to defend as a necessary survival tactic the way Massachusetts for-profits treat students with complicated disabilities.

An analysis of the way charter schools are funded in Massachusetts, however, reveals quite a different picture. Massachusetts charter school legislation stipulates that charter schools receive, for each student enrolled, "the average cost per student" in either the student's resident district or the district where the charter is located.[16] This means that each for-profit receives roughly the same amount of money for each student as its local district spends on each student (an amount ranging from $5,389 for Chelmsford to $7,805 for Renaissance). The total funding for the charter school is taken out of the local district's overall education funding.

We have already discussed how for-profits save money by serving substantially lower percentages of students with disabilities than do local district schools and by serving students with less complicated needs than those in local district schools. Compounding this saving is the fact that none of the for-profits have bilingual programs. These programs are expensive and heavily regulated. State law requires charter schools to implement bilingual programs if they have 20 or more students with limited English proficiency (LEP). All the for-profits except Chelmsford are located in districts with large numbers of recent immigrants and LEP children. However, none except for Seven Hills report an enrollment of 20 or more LEP students. Seven Hills reports an enrollment of 73 LEP students. And, according to attorney Jennifer Lopez, an expert in bilingual law, this makes the school's lack of a bilingual program a violation of state law.

Despite these statistics, each charter school receives funding based on its local district's substantially higher special education and bilingual expenses. To some extent, the law takes the higher district costs into account when it excludes the cost of private special placements from the calculation of average cost. But even this tiny concession to the reality of higher district expenses is flawed because local districts run their own expensive and substantially separate programs, pay for expensive early childhood programs, contribute to collaboratives, or, in Boston's case, fund entire schools that are equivalent to the private school placements that for-profits are exempted from funding.

On top of this, for-profit charter schools' definitions of students in substantially separate classes don't compare to the reality of these classes in district schools. The noncategorical system doesn't provide any information about the specific disability needs of students. Sabis International characterizes 20 students who are a few years behind grade level and receiving remedial services as a substantially separate class. In a local public school, a substantially separate class often consists of a dozen students with moderate cognitive, behavioral, or physical disabilities who need expensive nursing services, therapies, adaptive equipment, and so on.

Adding this together, it's clear that the way the Massachusetts charter school law calculates average cost per student gives for-profit schools a major financial advantage over district schools. It creates a situation in which charter schools receive funding for students with disabilities or with limited English proficiency whom they are not serving, allowing them to spend more on regular education. Meanwhile, poor district schools pay for considerably larger numbers of students with disabilities or with limited English proficiency whom they are serving. Then, adding insult to injury, the for-profit charter school sends expensive students back to the same district, forcing them to use even more of their diminished resources on special education.

But it doesn't stop there. Massachusetts charter school law forces local districts to pay transportation costs for charter school students who need busing. The for-profits can also create a nonprofit foundation (a for-profit nonprofit), thereby attracting large private donations. By the end of the 1996-97 school year, Boston Renaissance, Inc., had pulled in almost a million dollars in private donations.

For-profits are also eligible for state and federal grants. All of them have received tens of thousands of dollars in federal charter school start-up grants. Renaissance, Sabis International, Chelmsford, and Seven Hills have applied for and received Title I grants for low-income students. Only Somerville did not apply for and receive IDEA grants for students with disabilities. As in the case of state funding, for-profits receive the same amount of IDEA money per student as their local district even though they serve students with less complicated needs.

Indeed, far from being starved for resources, Massachusetts charter schools are the richest schools in the state. They certainly receive more than enough money to serve students with "expensive" disabilities. Of course, each school does have to provide a sizable percentage of its state funding to its educational contractor in the form of a management fee (almost a million dollars by the end of the 1996-97 school year in Sabis International's case) or contract. It's hard to accept, especially for a parent of a student with disabilities, that a "public school" funded by Massachusetts taxpayer money could be too resource-starved to properly serve children with disabilities when that same school is paying tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars to a company in New York, Tennessee, or Lebanon.

The (Profit) Motive

The Massachusetts for-profit management companies don't exclude students simply because they don't like the trappings of special education. Their impetus for excluding students with disabilities derives from the profit motive.[17] They understand that their survival and profitability depend on one factor — raising the test scores of regular education students. If they don't show substantial gains in test scores, they will lose their charters. Under these circumstances, students with disabilities, most of whom can't or won't perform well on standardized assessments, are liabilities. And, "from a school's perspective, finding a way to exclude the liabilities is a powerful means of improving performance."[18]

This obsession with raising standardized test scores is reflected in the for-profits' curriculum and instruction. Sabis, Edison, and Advantage schools emphasize the basic math and English skills that are the focus of statewide assessments. Their schools have large class sizes, forcing their often first-year teachers to depend heavily on texts and technology. This packaged, standardized approach to curriculum and instruction is the linchpin of their long-term business strategy. All the for-profit companies are in the process of establishing nationwide networks of schools. To reap the advantages of economy of scale, Sabis, Edison, and Advantage use a single, easily replicated curriculum and system of instruction.

Predictably, this "McCurriculum" approach does not mesh with special education. If the for-profits are going to maintain their economy of scale, students must fit the school. Special education emphasizes individualized instruction, which often requires expensive supports and services. For-profits avoid this requirement by using what Renaissance calls a "responsible inclusion model." This means that they place students with mild disabilities in regular classrooms and provide them with extra instruction until they perform at grade level. Students with more serious cognitive deficits or learning disabilities are generally removed from the regular classroom for remedial attention or left in the regular classroom without appropriate academic instruction.[19] This version of inclusion is inherently flawed. Most inclusion advocates believe that the true model, which emphasizes including all students with disabilities in regular education classrooms and integrating their therapeutic supports and services into the curriculum, is more expensive when properly implemented.

Debbie Drew, the foster mother of a child with a serious learning disability, reported how the inclusion model at Seven Hills worked for her daughter. She said that Seven Hills authorities failed to provide her daughter with any of the services specified in her IEP and instead dumped her in the regular classroom, where "she had no clue what was going on." At Sabis, when students reach grade level, they're returned to the inclusive classroom. But if they don't? "What we haven't figured out is what to do with some of them [who have been] in there two years and are still not up to grade level," said a Sabis employee.

Students with behavioral disabilities pose another problem for the for-profits. These schools see themselves as elite, "semi-private" institutions. The more exclusive they are, the better chance they have of attracting customers. Children with behavioral problems cause them to resemble the "out-of-control" public schools. Unless a child's behavior improves, he or she can't fit into an elite inclusion classroom. But changing behaviors takes time, expertise, training, and money — and, despite their abundant funding, it's evident from our interviews that for-profits don't want to waste resources on "problem kids." Instead, they use suspension and seclusion, and, when those methods don't work, they counsel the students out.

Again it's an Edison school, Boston Renaissance, that has been the worst offender on returning students. According to BPS, six of the 26 students who returned to Boston in 1997-98 were identified as having severe behavioral disabilities. None were identified by BPS as disabled when they entered Renaissance. Certainly public schools have not had a good track record with children with behavioral needs, but — unlike for-profits — they don't have the luxury of dumping their troublesome students on another school.

Where Does a Parent Go?

Do parents of children with disabilities who attend for-profit charter schools always have to call Lebanon to get answers? Is there anyone in Massachusetts they can ask for help — a board or an agency that would require a charter school to comply with the law?

According to the Massachusetts charter school regulations, the answer is yes. Parents of a student with disabilities who believe that a charter school is violating their child's rights can file a complaint with the school's board of trustees. If they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can file a complaint with the commissioner of education, who can refer the matter to the attorney general. In the event that the charter school is found to be in noncompliance with the law, the commissioner or the state board of education can revoke the school's charter. Parents can also file a complaint with the department of education.

It would appear that parents have plenty of avenues to address their grievances. It would also appear that for-profits can and will be held accountable by state agencies for their actions. Sadly, the realities of the charter school system and of Massachusetts' political climate make these accountability mechanisms practically worthless.

Let's begin with the possibility of filing a complaint with the for-profit charter school's board of trustees. Charter school supporters like to portray their schools as the outgrowth of a grassroots movement on the part of self-motivated parents, teachers, and community leaders. They paint a picture of concerned individuals coming together out of a mutual interest in improving local public education, organizing a board of trustees, and writing an application for a projected charter school.

Certainly, this was the case for many nonprofit charter schools. But in the case of for-profit charter schools, board members were often directly recruited by the school's management companies. Companies are forced into this tactic because the Massachusetts Charter School Law forbids a for-profit company from applying for a charter. However, the law does allow a charter school's board of directors to apply for a charter and then contract with a for-profit company for 100% of educational services. This provision is supposed to be a free-market mechanism that allows charter school boards to choose among competing contractors, picking the best service for the lowest price. But management companies use it as a way to apply for a charter indirectly.

This arrangement raises a number of conflict-of-interest issues. A school's board of trustees is responsible for enforcing the contract with the company and providing accountability to the local community. According to the 1996 report *The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative*, "When a Board of Trustees has hired a private company to manage the school and achieve the goals of the charter, it can easily terminate the contract if the Board isn't satisfied with the company's performance."[20]

By actively recruiting the very board members who are expected to "choose" them, management companies undermine the notion of board oversight. There is no indication in any of the press reports or charter school documents that any of these boards considered any educational contractors other than the ones they "chose." (So much for the free market.) Expecting such a board to "terminate a contract" for poor performance or to address a parent's complaint impartially is ludicrous.

During the most recent round of the charter school application process, management companies took this practice to a new low. The application for the new Sabis charter school describes board members as if they were product endorsers ("Mr. Hickey supports Sabis because of our . . . Mr. Buckley supports Sabis because of our . . ."). We found it especially peculiar, in an application "produced" by a board of community members, that every reference to Sabis is trademarked. There's even a reference to a SABIS® cheerleading team leading SABIS® cheers.

But the prize for stacking boards of trustees has to go to the newest player in the Massachusetts for-profit field, Advantage Schools, and its president, Steve Wilson. Wilson, a former co-director of the pro-charter Pioneer Institute and advisor to then-Gov. William Weld, drafted key parts of the very charter school law from which he expects to profit. The board of his recently opened charter school in Malden includes a significant number of former Republican state senatorial aides and campaign operatives. His own employee was listed as the board's contact person on the original charter application.[21] Under these circumstances, the chances that a parental complaint will result in a decision against the Advantage charter school are extremely remote.

Of course, a parent can still submit a complaint to the commissioner of education or to the department of education. But the commissioner is subject to political pressures, and charter schools are a favorite initiative of an element of the Massachusetts political establishment. (Commissioner Frank Haydu III quit in July because he believed that politics was interfering with his ability to make sound educational decisions.[22]) The Massachusetts Board of Education, which can suspend or revoke a school's charter for violations of the law, is headed by John Silber, a man whose visceral disdain for special education is evidenced by his remark "Some of the things that pass for learning disabilities used to be called stupidity."[23] The board of education is packed with for-profit supporters such as James Peyser (former co-director of the Pioneer Institute along with Steve Wilson), Abigail Thernstrom (a member of Advantage's academic advisory council), and Roberta Schaefer (who helped Steve Wilson pick his new Worcester charter's board of trustees). It's hard to imagine this cast of characters voting to sanction a charter school because of a mere parent's complaint.

Then there is the Massachusetts Department of Education. DOE is supposedly free from political pressures. But we have heard from a DOE official that when Chelmsford and Seven Hills opened in 1996, the office of then-Gov. Weld successfully pressured the agency to provide the schools with IDEA funds despite their not having met any of the federal requirements for this money. The official, who asked to remain anonymous, said, "We were under so much pressure from the governor's office to help charter schools starting up that we had to find a way to send them IDEA grants even though they hadn't submitted program plans or child counts." The same official reported that the state tried to send $32,000 of the Worcester district's IDEA money to the Seven Hills charter school. When Ruth Gadbois, director of special education for Worcester, found that this IDEA money was being sent to Seven Hills, she threatened to sue. According to Gadbois, DOE then reinstated her funds and gave Seven Hills the funding from the IDEA discretionary fund. This sort of fiscal manipulation could have resulted in the state's loss of federal IDEA money. If the state would jeopardize tens of millions of dollars to give a few thousand dollars to a couple of for-profit charter schools, how can it be expected to consider a parent complaint impartially?

As for complaints from parents that DOE did receive, the department of special education conducted an audit in 1997 of the special education program at Boston Renaissance. In their report, the auditors do not mention having discussed any parent complaints with school officials. Nor do they report having discussed any of the recent OCR complaints that the school had settled. Despite evidence that Renaissance was violating students' and parents' rights, the auditors gave the school passing marks.[24]

But that's not the worst of it. The last place a parent should go for assistance is the very state agency charged with monitoring charter schools — the State Charter School Office. In 1995 the forerunner of this office, the Executive Office of Education, headed by James Peyser, sent a technical advisory to charter schools providing a blueprint for "counseling out" students with disabilities.[25] As our recent parent interviews revealed, for-profits have taken the state's advice to heart. There is no record in the charter school office that any subsequent technical advisory or legal memorandum was sent out to countermand the advice in this memo.

The current director of the charter school office is Scott Hamilton. Hamilton is fond of referring to charter schools as "the most accountable schools in Massachusetts." But his office has provided far more charter school propaganda than accountability.[26] In response to questions about the propriety of companies making a profit from public education, he has compared for-profits to the textbook and transportation companies that already make a profit from public education, ignoring the fact that a textbook or transportation company does not have the power to violate the rights of students in the pursuit of profits. He has pointed out charter schools' improvements in test scores, as if test scores were the only measure of a school's success, the only aspect of a child's education for which a school should be held accountable. He has questioned the motives of the persons asking the question, portraying them as pro-union supporters of the "status quo" in public education, thereby evading the legitimate concerns of these citizens about for-profit education.

Hamilton's responses are typical of supporters of for-profit charter schools. Rather than engage in substantive discussions about the for-profit concept and its effect on parents and children, they nearly always chant the mantra of "improved test scores" or challenge the motives of those who question the free market's ability to give children a better education.

A Lost Opportunity

Charter schools in Massachusetts have been granted considerable advantages over local public schools. Many of the nonprofit charter schools are using these advantages to provide an excellent education for students with complicated disabilities, often for the first time in their school careers. Parents of these students are understandably enthusiastic about the charter school model. Many of these parents have had legitimate concerns about the public school system, and the opportunity to have a choice has been a transforming experience.

In the right circumstances, for-profit charter schools could also represent a powerful opportunity for students with complicated disabilities and for their families. As we have shown, these schools have the financial resources to provide an appropriate education for any student with a disability. Unfortunately, the basic interest of these schools in making a profit has often been incompatible with offering an appropriate education to students who require expensive supports and services. To parents of these students, for-profit charter schools do not represent a choice. If the politicians and the state officials who support the for-profit charter school concept are going to give parents this choice, they must protect parents' rights by enforcing federal and state laws.

Indeed, if we have learned anything from our study, it is the importance of enforcement, of requiring schools to be accountable for more than test scores. In the absence of accountability, for-profit charter schools will have the same incentive that public schools had before the passage of IDEA to exclude students with complicated disabilities and to ignore the rights that a generation of parents of children with disabilities fought so hard to acquire. After studying for-profits, it is clear to us that the much-maligned requirements of IDEA were adopted for the right reasons. As it stands, for-profit education in Massachusetts is re-creating the pre-1975 era, when public schools could choose whom they would educate and students with complicated disabilities were shunted away to institutions. In essence, the for-profits are becoming those pre-1975 public schools, and local district schools are becoming the institutions filled with their castoffs.[27]

Parents of students with complicated disabilities shouldn't need another IDEA to give them a choice in public education. What they need is for Massachusetts politicians and state officials to set aside ideology and to make for-profit charter schools if not the most accountable schools in Massachusetts at least accountable to the parents whose tax dollars are the source of their profit.

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1. Lamar Alexander, "School Choice in the Year 2000," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1993, pp. 762-66.

2. See Peter Applebome, "Lure of the Education Market Remains Strong for Business," *New York Times*, 31 January 1996, p. A-1. This article reports that the United States spends $340 billion on preschool to high school education and that, overall, public education is a $600-billion enterprise, constituting 8.9% of the gross domestic product, second only to health care.

3. See "Appendix B: State Case Studies: Massachusetts," in Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno Manno, and Louann Bierlein, *Charter Schools in Action: What Have We Learned?* (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1996). The authors state that "nowhere else in the universe of charter states has such a large percentage of for-profit firms been so involved in Charter Schools."

4. See Angela Dale and Dave DeSchryver, *The Charter School Workbook: Your Roadmap to the Charter School Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Education Reform, 1997). Chapter 2 of this handbook ranks charter school legislation from strongest to weakest. The Massachusetts Charter School Law is ranked the fifth strongest law in the nation.

5. See charter school applications, financial audits, and end-of-the-year reports, which are available from the State Charter School Office, 1 Ashburton Place, Rm. 1403, Boston, MA 02108.

6. For these data, see *The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative* (Malden: Massachusetts Department of Education, January 1997).

7. See Finn, Manno, and Bierlein, op. cit.; Chester E. Finn, Jr., Louann Bierlein, and Bruno Manno, *Charter Schools in Action: A First Look* (Washington, D.C.: Educational Excellence Network, 1996); and Bruno Manno et al., "Charter Schools: Accomplishments and Dilemmas," *Teachers College Record*, Spring 1998, pp. 537-58.

8. For these statistics, see *1996-97 School Systems Summary Report: Special Education Incidence* (Malden: Information and Outreach Service, Massachusetts Department of Education, March 1998).

9. M.G.L. c.71, Sec. 89; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§1401-1491; and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. §794.

10. Peggy Farber, "The Edison Project Scores — and Stumbles — in Boston," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1998, pp. 506-11.

11. *Shayna W. v. Boston Renaissance School*, BSEA 96-1272 (Boston, 1996); and *Rebha G. v. Boston Renaissance School*, BSEA 96-2207 (Boston, 1996).

12. For detailed explanations of the legal obligations of charter schools toward students with disabilities and discussions of the legality of counseling out, see Joseph R. McKinney, "Charter Schools and Their Legal Responsibilities Toward Children with Disabilities," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Education Law Association, Chicago, November 1997; Jay Heubert, "Schools Without Rules? Charter Schools, Federal Disability Law, and the Paradoxes of Deregulation," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, Summer 1997, pp. 301-53; and *Questions and Answers: Application of Federal Civil Rights Laws to Public Charter Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, November 1997).

13. Nancy J. Zollers, "Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities: Findings from the First Nationwide Survey of Charter Schools and Special Education," paper presented at the Annual Charter School Conference, Milwaukee, April 1995.

14. Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Good Intentions Gone Awry in Special Education," *National Review*, 11 March 1996, pp. 18-25; Finn, Manno, and Bierlein, op. cit.; Finn, Bierlein, and Manno, op. cit.; and Manno et al., op. cit.

15. For a comparison of education expenditures by district, see the Massachusetts Department of Education website (doe.mass.edu/pubs/win/pp96day.xls).

16. For an explanation of how Massachusetts calculates average cost per student for charter school funding, see "Technical Advisory — Definition of Average Cost Per Student," memorandum from Secretary Piedad Robertson and Commissioner Robert Antonucci to Secretary Charles Baker, 8 December 1994.

17. For an overview of the history of educational management companies and an analysis of their present and previous efforts to make money in public education, see Craig E. Richards, Rima Shore, and Max B. Sawicky, *Risky Business: Private Management of Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 1996); and F. Howard Nelson, "How Private Management Firms Seek to Make Money in Public Schools," *Journal of School Business Management*, Spring 1997, pp. 73-92.

18. Richard J. Murnane and Frank Levy, "What General Motors Can Teach U.S. Schools About the Proper Role of Markets in Education Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 1996, pp. 108-14.

19. For an analysis of management companies' curricula and instruction; their heavy reliance on inexperienced, first-year teachers; and the "inclusion" model as part of their overall business strategy, see Richards, Shore, and Sawicky, op. cit.; Nelson, op. cit.; and idem, *Student Achievement in Edison Schools: Mixed Results in an Ongoing Enterprise* (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers, Spring 1998).

20. *The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative*, p. 15.

21. Adrian Walker, "Conflicts of Interest Cited in Charter School Awards; Board Members Deny Opponents' Charge," *Boston Globe*, 28 February 1998, p. B-1; and Carolyn Ryan, "Ex-Gov. Aide to Cash In on Kids; Advisor Who Co-Wrote Law Gets Two School Charters," *Boston Herald*, 27 February 1998, p. A-1.

22. Jordana Hart, "Outgoing Chief Blasts Ed. Board," *Boston Globe*, 1 July 1998, p. A-1.

23. Patrick Collins, "All in a Day's Work: Jeers, Cheers, and Changing Gears," *Standard Times*, 15 January 1997, p. A-1.

24. *Coordinated Program Review: Boston Renaissance Charter School* (Malden: Program Quality Assurance, Massachusetts Department of Education, September 1997).

25. "Charter School Technical Advisory: Subject Special Education," memorandum from Undersecretary Jim Peyser to charter schools and school superintendents, 25 July 1995.

26. For an example of the material produced by the State Charter School Office, see *The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative*.

27. For a discussion of the stratifying effects of school choice, see Gerald W. Bracey, "The Sixth Bracey Report on the Condition of Public Education," *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 1996, pp. 129-31; and for a report exploring this issue in England, see Kathryn Stearns, *School Reform: Lessons from England: A Special Report* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1996). K

PUBLIC-PRIVATE CHOICE

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OVERVIEW

THE ISSUE of school choice was highlighted in the platforms of both the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates and appears on many state-level legislative agendas. Of the options under consideration, none is so controversial and contentious as the idea of using public funds to provide or defray the cost of private school tuition. These public-private programs not only represent the most dramatic approach to increased parental choice, but they also stand as the most obvious alternative to traditional thinking on the nature and role of public schooling.

Despite the visibility of the issue and the vehemence with which it is argued by those on both sides, little is known about the effect of these programs on students, families, or schools themselves. Ideological arguments and editorials fill the pages of scholarly and popular journals, and the limited available research on these programs is often misrepresented. The result is substantial misunderstanding of the nature of these alternatives to school choice and of their likely or even intended outcomes.

Both tuition tax credits and education vouchers attempt to support private school education by redirecting public funds for education. In both cases, choices are increased to include both the public and private sectors by supplementing the cost of school tuition for families so choosing. Education vouchers, like those provided in programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland, explicitly support private school enrollment by providing vouchers for all or most of the cost of tuition at the chosen school. The vouchers are distributed to parents who then can use them at participating private schools. Thus, funds are distributed to private schools through the choosing parents, not directly from the state to the schools. This difference has been critical in recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings on the use of public funds for private education, though the Court has thus far declined to hear any voucher cases.

Voucher programs, because they are tremendously contentious and have become an issue of political debate, are the more visible of the two approaches. Literally hundreds of articles in the popular press or media appear each week, usually presenting the views of one or the other side of the issue. Not infrequently, these stories refer to studies or research that support or refute the value of private school vouchers. Unfortunately, however, there is limited research on the issue that has been conducted by reputable scholars. As a result, judgments about these programs continue to be made largely on ideology rather than on fact. In this chapter, we have attempted to provide what we believe to be representative, objective research on the issue.

Tuition tax credits less directly support private school enrollment. Tax credits help families defray the cost of private school tuition by offering a delimited credit for the cost of private schooling against families' tax indebtedness. In most states, the tax credit is worth from $250 to $500 per child, thus defraying only a portion of the total cost of tuition.

Discussion of both state and federal tuition tax credit programs was greatest during the mid-1980s. It was at that time that the Reagan administration worked openly to implement a national system of tuition tax credit, with many state legislatures pressing for similar programs at the state level. In recent years, the issue of tuition tax credits has been much less visible in the media and in the scholarly literature. There is, in fact, almost no research on tax credit programs, with most literature presenting instead arguments for or against the concept. We have attempted in this chapter to provide a range of views on the issue, even though they are largely only learned opinion.

As they have been implemented to date, both tuition tax credit and voucher programs are targeted to provide the greatest benefit to low-income families. Tuition tax credits are usually provided to families earning less than a specified amount and, in many cases, are reduced or eliminated for families with greater income. In both Cleveland and Milwaukee, low-income families are given preference in the distribution of educational vouchers. Although the Florida supreme court has ruled it unconstitutional, the statewide voucher program in Florida uses only the poor performance of a child's public school as the criterion for eligibility.

The goal of this chapter is to provide a range of views on these two approaches to allowing the use of public funds for private school enrollment. We have included research studies and reports, as well as scholarly papers written by advocates and opponents of school choice. Because the Reagan administration attempted repeatedly to implement a federal tuition tax credit program, most available literature on this approach is drawn from the 1980s, but the concepts and ideas remain the same. In contrast, private school voucher programs were a focus of attention in the last decade of the twentieth century and, as a result, the literature we have included on this approach tends to be much more current. In either case, we have attempted to present information that reflects the diversity of opinion regarding the use of public funds to support private school choice for families.

Some Things You May Want to Know About Tuition Tax Credits

by Russell I. Thackrey

The debate over tuition tax credits has too often become a war of words that has little connection with reality. Mr. Thackrey answers some commonly asked questions on this controversial topic.

CONFUSED ABOUT tuition tax credits? No wonder. People who report on them in print and on the airwaves are confused too. As Anne Lewis observed in the October 1983 *Kappan*, U.S. press correspondents are "basically uninformed about educational issues at the national level."[1] That's why articles about tuition tax credits run mostly to "proponents say. . . ," followed by "opponents say. . . ," or vice versa – the statements by the two camps directly contradicting one another, even though everybody is talking about the same legislative proposal.

- "Proponents say that tax credits will improve the public schools through competition. Opponents say they will hurt the public schools."
- "Proponents stress that tax credits will be of special help to low-income families who scrimp to send their children to church-affiliated schools. Opponents say the bill will be of little help to such families and may, indeed, be harmful to them."

And so on. The mass media often discuss issues of constitutionality, federal control, quality, and cost of tuition tax credits in the same manner. Quoting one side and then the other on any complicated and controversial issue gives at least the illusion of "fairness"; this approach is also much easier than studying what proposed legislation actually says and gathering expert opinion on its likely effects.

Meanwhile, many major issues related to tuition tax credits have been obscured by this "great debate." And the debate itself – even among such knowledgeable and intelligent people as teachers, school board members, concerned parents, and legislators – has too often become a "war of words" that has little connection with reality.

The divergence of views on tuition tax credits is easy to illustrate. For example, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, which usually speaks for the church on legislative issues, has strongly supported tax credit legislation. However, support for such legislation by Catholic members of Congress is far from unanimous. In a test vote in the Senate last November on an Administration-sponsored tuition tax credit bill (S. 528), a majority of those senators who had identified themselves as Catholic in the *Congressional Handbook* voted against the bill, which was tabled by a margin of 59-38.

Tax credits no doubt enjoy more Senate support "in principle" than this margin suggests. The grim prospect of cutting federal revenues during a time of unprecedented budget deficits was one factor in the defeat of the bill. Certain senators also desired specific provisions that this bill did not include. However, tax credit legislation in one form or another has been before Congress since the early Fifties, and the issue is not going to go away.

TUITION TAX credits were proposed in the early Fifties by the Yale Alumni Board, which hoped to obtain federal money for higher education without submitting to direct federal control. The method was simple: colleges and universities would raise their tuitions by the amount of the tax credit. Those who paid tuition would be no worse off, and millions of dollars otherwise destined for the federal treasury as tax payments would flow instead into the treasuries of institutions of higher education.

The early tax credit proposals covered only tuitions paid to colleges and univer-

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RUSSELL I. THACKREY served as executive director of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Washington, D.C., from 1947 until his retirement in 1970. In 1979 he moved to Manhattan, Kan., where he had earlier served Kansas State University as professor, department head, dean of administration, and director of the summer school. The views expressed in this article are the author's own and are not attributable to any institution or organization.

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sities – both public and private. But as time went on, supporters of government aid for church-affiliated K-12 schools began to see tuition tax credits as a possible detour around the Supreme Court decisions that barred such aid as a violation of the First Amendment. Tuition tax credit bills were introduced that covered private schools (sectarian and nonsectarian), as well as institutions of higher education. Then, because the size of a tax credit is limited by the amount of federal tax owed, proposed legislation began to include "fairness" features, intended to provide cash payments to parents equal to the difference between the taxes they owed and their allowable tuition tax credits. A limit was also placed on the amount of taxable income that an individual could have and still receive a tax credit.

As tuition charges rose through the years, the proposed maximum allowable tax credit also was raised. The projected annual cost in revenue lost to the federal treasury rose to between $8 billion and $10 billion.

Although tax cuts and increased spending on defense brought unprecedentedly large budget deficits late in 1982, President Reagan nonetheless proposed a tuition tax credit plan for parents of children attending private elementary and secondary schools. However, his proposal cut the maximum allowable tax credit from $1,000 to $300 (and to only $100 during the first year) and eliminated the costly "fairness" feature that would have provided "refunds" to those low-income families unable to claim the full tax credit to which they were otherwise entitled.

In February 1983, at the request of the President, a revised bill was introduced in the Senate. This revised bill eliminated those features of the 1982 bill that would have compelled all private schools whose patrons claimed tuition tax credits to abide by state compulsory attendance laws and to enroll handicapped students.

On 20 June 1983 the Senate Finance Committee voted 11-7 to send this revised bill, the Educational Opportunity and Equity Act of 1983 (S. 528), with only minor changes, to the Senate floor for action. On November 18 the full Senate tabled the measure.

THE QUESTIONS and answers that follow attempt to explore the major issues involved in tuition tax credits.* All mentions of "the bill," of "the Administration proposal," or of "President Reagan's proposal" refer to Senate Bill 528. (Readers may be able to obtain copies of S. 528, 98th Congress, first session, and of the accompanying report, Senate Committee Report No. 98-154, from their representatives or senators.)

If Congress approves tax credits, the constitutional issue involved in this matter will no doubt eventually reach the High Court.

What is a tuition tax credit?

A tuition tax credit would allow individuals paying tuition to specified categories of educational institutions to deduct from the income taxes they owe to the federal government a specified percentage of the tuition paid, up to a specified maximum. Under the proposed bill, the tax credit would cover 50% of the tuition paid to private elementary or secondary schools, with a maximum of $100 in the first year. This maximum would rise to $300 for the third and later years.

Would this constitute "federal support" of church-related schools?

The bill says that tax credits "shall not" constitute federal financial assistance to the schools or individuals involved. But Chester E. Finn, Jr., a former top aide to Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), a leading sponsor of tax credit bills, commented – in an article that appeared in the Education Section of the *New York Times* on 11 November 1982 – that "insofar as transferring additional financial resources into private schools might strengthen them, . . . the tax credit mechanism was imaginatively conceived, moderately efficient, and likely to be fairly effective." Finn, now a professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, also said that tax credits were seen as "the most promising detour around increasingly confusing Supreme Court decisions placed in the way of public aid to nongovernmental secondary education." (Readers should note that there are no constitutional provisions that the Court has interpreted as barring aid to private *nonsectarian* education.)

On at least two occasions, the press has quoted President Reagan's statement to Catholic audiences that, although direct federal support of church-affiliated schools would violate the First Amendment, tax credits would not. Each time, the President also noted that, if private schools would raise their tuitions by the amount of the tax credit, they could receive money "otherwise going for taxes" and still not hurt their patrons financially. If Congress approves tax credits, the constitutional issue will no doubt eventually reach the Supreme Court.

Are other than First Amendment issues involved in the question of whether or not tax credits constitute governmental support of church-related schools or institutions of higher education?

Yes, indeed. The issue of whether "indirect aid" (i.e., aid that passes to a school or institution of higher education through students, parents, etc.) constitutes "support" has important implications for all anti-discrimination legislation, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which bars discrimination against women by institutions that receive federal support.[2] Ever since 1954, when the Supreme Court held state-enforced or state-supported racial segregation unconstitutional, efforts to find a detour around this and other barriers to discrimination have persisted. Several states responded to the 1954 decision by passing laws that gave parents vouchers with which to pay tuition at the schools of their choice. Federal courts held these laws unconstitutional, because states may not do indirectly what they may not do directly, i.e., support segregated schools.

What about tax credits and racial discrimination? Doesn't the bill have strong anti-discrimination provisions?

Yes and no. Yes, because the bill says that "tax relief" given under it "may not be used to promote racial discrimination" (which is defined as including discrimination against both racial and ethnic groups). Schools for which parents could claim tax credits would have to certify annually to the secretary of the treasury that they do not discriminate. Copies of a given school's statement would be distributed to all of its tuition payers, who would have to attach these copies to their income tax returns claiming tax credits for tuition payments. Schools for which parents could claim tax credits would also have to be exempt from taxes under the Internal Revenue Code, and the Supreme Court has held that discriminatory schools cannot be tax exempt. From an administrative point of view, these requirements are a substantial improvement over earlier tuition tax credit bills, which would have given the Internal Revenue Service no way of determining whether claimed tax credits were, in fact, for tuition paid to eligible schools.

However, the provisions for enforcing the anti-discrimination requirement seem questionable to me. The bill gives the U.S. attorney general "exclusive authority to investigate and determine whether an educational institution is following a racially discriminatory policy." Specific complaints would have to be filed in writing with the attorney general, who would "promptly" notify the school and get its response. If the attorney general failed to find cause for the complaint, the complainant would be so notified and told that the reasons for the decision were available. If the attorney general found cause for the complaint, either the school would have to agree to quit discriminating or the attorney general would have to ask the federal district court of the district in which the school is located to make a declaratory judgment of discrimination. If the school agreed to quit discriminating, the attorney general would notify the complainant of the terms of this agreement. If the district court made a declaratory judgment of discrimination, the parents of children attending the school would not be allowed to claim tuition tax credits unless and until the school proved that it had changed its policies.

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*Because of space limitations, I have omitted the sources for many statements that I cite. A list of these sources is available to any reader who writes me (2015 Meadowlark Rd., Apt. 2, Manhattan, KS 66502) and encloses a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

I see several problems with this approach. First, complainants would not be allowed to take their cases directly to the courts. Yet U.S. history reminds us that "separate but obviously unequal" schools and public accommodations remained the rule after the *Brown* decision – in the federally administered District of Columbia, as well as in the southern and border states – until the Supreme Court gave complainants direct access to the courts.

A second problem is that both Attorney General William French Smith and Edwin Meese III, nominated by President Reagan to be Smith's successor, have consistently pushed for narrow interpretations of civil rights laws barring discrimination. For example, Smith refused to represent the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) before the Supreme Court when two schools that admitted to practicing racial discrimination appealed the revocation of their tax-exempt status by the IRS. With White House backing, Smith made it clear that he thought the schools had interpreted the law correctly. The Supreme Court disagreed. The Reagan Administration has also urged a narrow interpretation of Title IX. (To be fair to both Smith and Meese, the legislation authorizing Title IX was sloppily drafted; Congress sometimes tries to pass the buck to the courts.) But the point is that, given a choice, both Smith and his designated successor tend toward narrow interpretations of civil rights laws.

A third problem is that, if a federal district court were asked to make a declaratory judgment of discrimination against a school within its jurisdiction and refused, the complaint would die – *unless* the attorney general appealed. If the court did issue a declaratory judgment, the school could appeal. If the school "won" – initially or on appeal – the federal government would pay the school's legal costs.

What about educational standards? What standards would a school have to meet to qualify for tuition tax credits?

The tuition tax credit proposal specifies no requirements of any kind with regard to teacher preparation, curriculum, and so on. To qualify for tax credits, a school would merely have to offer a full-time program of elementary or secondary education and to be private, nonprofit, tax exempt under the Internal Revenue Code, and nondiscriminatory. That's all.

The tuition tax credit proposal specifies no requirements of any kind with regard to teacher preparation, curriculum, and so on.

Isn't it the responsibility of the states to set standards that schools should meet under compulsory attendance laws, which are designed to protect children from exploitation and assure them access to education?

Despite the Administration's insistence that education is primarily a state responsibility, the Administration's tax credit bill of 1983 eliminates a previously included requirement for compliance with state standards and probably would be construed as barring the states from setting standards for private schools whose patrons receive tax credits. In reply to a question on the reason for this change, Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said that the Administration did not want to place on the states the responsibility for determining the eligibility of private schools for tax credits. Given the usual priority of federal statutes over state ones in the event of conflict, the state requirements affecting private schools whose patrons receive tax credits would apparently be limited to those involving health and safety. Under S. 528, even a school operated by an extremist cult could qualify for tax credits.

But don't studies show that the educational programs of private schools in general – and of church-operated schools in particular – are usually equal or superior to those of public schools?

The studies referred to here were of "traditional" private schools (chiefly those operated by the Roman Catholic church and those categorized as highly selective secular schools), and even their findings have been questioned. But we know little or nothing of the church-affiliated schools that have sprung up in recent years. We are not even certain about their number. Writing in the *New Yorker* of 18 May 1981, Frances FitzGerald quoted Moral

Majority leader Jerry Falwell as saying that 16,000 new Christian schools had been established in the U.S. by October 1980 – most of them, since the Sixties – and that the number was growing at the rate of "one every seven hours." In an April 1983 broadcast, Falwell estimated the number of new Christian schools at 25,000. Others place the number much lower, but all agree that the rate of growth has been rapid.

Since we are not even sure of the number of these new private schools, it is not surprising that we also know little about their enrollments, curricula, standards for teacher preparation, and so on. What we do know, however, is that many of the new fundamentalist schools refuse to recognize the authority of the state to regulate them – except, in some cases, for health and safety standards. The press has reported that some of these schools use the first chapter of Genesis as a text for instruction in biology.

What's wrong with that, if parents desire that kind of instruction for their children?

It's difficult to draw a line between governmental toleration of widely divergent religious beliefs and practices (free exercise) and governmental responsibility to see that children have an opportunity for education that is adequate to their future needs. This much seems clear, however: demands that society support with tax funds those schools that refuse to meet the minimum standards set by society go far beyond the limits of "tolerance." Independence of government carries a price tag: independence of government support.

Aren't concerns that tuition tax credits may lead to government "control" of private schools, including church-affiliated schools, far-fetched? (After all, the Administration proposal imposes no requirements as to curriculum or teacher preparation, and it does not require compliance with state-established standards.)

These concerns are not at all far-fetched, in the view of many experienced educators. For example, Carolyn Warner, the state superintendent of public instruction in Arizona, told a College Board Forum on 25 October 1982 that tuition tax credits would lead to "an incredible proliferation of nonpublic schools" and that these new schools would represent a wide range of extremist political, religious, and social views. In the scenario that Warner foresaw, the public – concerned about the quality of these schools – would call for a federal investigation. Next, Congress would ask a federal agency to develop a "minimum core curriculum" for nonpublic schools whose patrons claim tax credits. In the final scene, Warner added, all schools – public and private – would be required to follow a standard curriculum and would be subject to the same judicial directives. Chester Finn tends to agree. He told the *New York Times* (Education Section, 11 November 1982) that tax credits, in the version that the Reagan Administration takes seriously, would almost certainly be "accompanied by an array of government regulations and constraints that would erode the distinctiveness and worth" of private education.

Is it true that tuition tax credits would be especially helpful to low-income families?

Much published information on tuition tax credits suggests that this would be the case, and some surveys of parents (including one by the Gallup Organization and another by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education) have been so structured as to leave this impression. Press reports of these surveys have indicated that a substantial shift to private schools would occur among children from low-income families, if tuition tax credits became a reality.

But the Administration-backed tax credit bill of 1983 that was tabled by the Senate last November gives low-income families little or no help. Indeed, if passed, this bill might leave such families substantially worse off than before. This is the case because tax credits are usable only to the extent that federal taxes are owed. A family with a taxable income of $7,500 and with more than one child would owe virtually no federal income tax. However, if private schools followed the President's suggestion and raised their tuitions by the amount of the maximum tax credit, such families would be worse off by the amount of the tuition increase, in terms of being able to send their children to private schools.

I've read that high-income families would not be eligible for tax credits. Is this correct?

High-income families whose total incomes are taxable by the federal government would not be eligible for tax credits. But the same is not necessarily true of high-income families who secure a portion of their incomes from nontaxed investments, such as state and municipal securities. For a family whose income comes all or mostly from taxable sources, the tax credit allowed under the proposed bill would start declining at the $40,000 income level and would end completely at an income level of more than $50,000. By contrast, a family with, say, $150,000 in tax-exempt income and $39,000 in taxable income could take the full allowable tax credit for tuitions paid – even though this family's total income came to $189,000.

What about the potential cost of tuition tax credits in lost tax receipts?

The potential costs of the latest bill are lower by many billions of dollars than the estimated costs of earlier proposals.

Because of the huge budget deficit, the latest Administration bill has been drastically scaled down from earlier proposals. Costs in lost taxes under the current proposal have been estimated to be $229 million in the first year, $491 million in the second year, and somewhat more than $700 million in the third year and thereafter.

As recently as the 97th Congress (1981-82), however, the major tax credit proposal before the Senate would have covered not only elementary and secondary private schools, but also all of higher education (public and private), area vocational/technical schools, and special schools for the handicapped. Not only did this earlier proposal cover tuitions for several million more students, but it also authorized payments from the federal treasury to low-income families to make up the difference between the taxes they owed and the tax credits to which they were entitled. In the 1981-82 bill the maximum tax credit was $1,000 – more than three times the maximum set by the latest Administration proposal. The cost of this earlier proposal in lost taxes was estimated to be $8 billion to $10 billion annually.

The potential costs of the latest Administration bill are lower by many billions of dollars than the estimated costs of earlier proposals. But debate in the Senate has already indicated that strong efforts will be made to restore most features of the earlier proposals and to add new ones. Thus, if enacted, tuition tax credits would constitute a new class of entitlements – neither subject to control by the appropriations process nor predictable for purposes of budget making.

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1. Anne C. Lewis, "Reagan and Critics Exchange Salvos in First Round of War of Statistics," *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 1983, p. 83.
2. In February 1984 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on this issue as it relates to Title IX. For details on *Grove City College v. Bell*, see Thomas J. Flygare, "The Supreme Court's Title IX Decision: Who Won?," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1984, pp. 640-41.

Tuition Tax Credits
and Education Vouchers

PRIVATE INTERESTS AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

Tax credits and vouchers raise fundamental questions about the relationship between schooling and society.

By DENNIS P. DOYLE

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TUITION TAX CREDITS OR TUITION VOUCHERS are far removed from most of what educators think about—curriculum, teacher licensing, minimum standards, school finance reform, classroom management, and government regulation. Rather, tax credits and vouchers raise fundamental questions about the relationship of schooling to the larger society: the tension between professional and parent, and the role and place of values in education. Finally, and most important in a democratic republic, they force us to re-examine the tension between equality and liberty. This, of course, is precisely why they are controversial. If vouchers or tax credits were simply a device to administer education differently, there would be discussion but not impassioned debate. To see why this is the case, we must return to the beginning.

Over the past 50 years, the line that distinguished the public sector from the private has been blurred. Health care, housing, food and nutrition programs, Social Security, and unemployment compensation are all infused with large measures of public funding. In the case of schooling, however, there has been a strong historical commitment to universal free education, and public funding for private elementary and secondary education has been off-limits. There are some public subsidies of a minor nature: Gifts to private schools are tax-deductible, and private school property is exempt from real estate tax. While these tax forgivenesses are thought to stimulate philanthropy and reduce school costs, their effects are modest.

The current debate about tuition tax credits or education vouchers renews the old question about how and where the line between the public and private sector should be drawn. And it raises two major issues: The extent to which private schools should receive government aid, if at all, and the extent to which such aid might lead to government control of private schools.

The issues are of special interest to economists and political scientists because there is no *a priori* reason to believe that government must own and operate the means of production to provide public goods or services. Government may as easily—or even more easily—provide funds and let the private sector satisfy public program objectives. In this vein, state governments do not build their own highways or public buildings: The lowest bidder does. Similarly, Medicare recipients are not required to "spend" their Medicare funds in public hospitals.

The reason for this is obvious enough. At its most elevated it is what Charles Schultze of the Brookings Institution calls the public use of private interest. At a more prosaic level, it recognizes that different people have different tastes and different preferences. In this formulation, choice is a virtue, one that should be satisfied.

Now, if parental choice in education is to be increased, short of wholesale reconfiguration of the public sector, the most obvious device is government funding of private schools. Three principal options are available—direct aid to institutions, education vouchers for individual students, or "negative" transfer payments through the tax system in the form of tax credits. The court has repeatedly struck down direct funding of private institutions as unconstitutional because the vast majority of them have religious ties. But vouchers might pass constitutional muster, as indeed tax credits have recently done in *Mueller* v. *Allen*.

As well, there is the possibility of public scholarships and loans, or what Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan calls "the baby-BEOGS" program, in which the eligibility floor for the basic educational opportunity grants would drop to primary and secondary education. The advantages of such a program would be several. Because eligibility is based on income, it would go only to the truly needy. If it were designed properly, public school children could use the program for supplemental or enrichment activities. And perhaps most important from

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The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the scholars, trustees, or staff of the American Enterprise Institute. Parts of this article have appeared in slightly different form in the *New York University Quarterly* magazine.

an economic standpoint, because it would reach only a fraction of the children in private schools (unlike tax credits which would reach everyone who pays taxes), tuition would not be driven up in an amount equal to the tax credit. Unfortunately, there seems to be no constituency for such a program: It is clearly odd-man out in any discussion of aid to private schools.

At this juncture it is important to stress that the growing interest in private school aid plans is not because of the Reagan administration, but because of a persistent shift toward private education in the recent past. As the number of school-age children continues to decline, the number of children enrolled in private schools is increasing. By 1986, for example, the National Center for Education Statistics predicts a 12 percent increase in private school enrollments, from 5 million to 5.6 million children. Yet as recently as three years ago, the best available data suggested continued private school decline. Bruce Cooper and his colleagues, in the most recent issue of the *Teachers College Record*, report that their data reveal a trend line that points to 15 percent private school enrollment by 1990.

Indeed, we are witnessing a remarkable historic transformation. For years, as private education grew progressively weaker, the clamor for aid became more shrill. But it fell on deaf ears. As recently as 1977, Senator Moynihan's stirring defense of aid to private schools in *Harper's Magazine* was titled "The Federal Government and the Ruin of Private Education." His thesis was simple: Without aid, private schools would languish and even disappear. But today, it is clear that the system in danger is not private schools. At risk today is a faltering public system. In fact, one interesting way to frame the question is in traditional public policy terms: The justification for public intervention in a private market is real or threatened market failure. Today we see growing "privatization" of education because of public sector market failure. Public schools fail to satisfy an ever-larger segment of the population.

Today we see growing "privatization" of education because of public sector market failure. Public schools fail to satisfy an ever-larger segment of the population.

For the first time in recent history, then, there is a realistic possibility of public aid to private schools, not because they are weak, but because they are strong. Ironically, public support could then be the Achilles Heel of private education, for just as the power to tax is the power to destroy, the power to provide aid is the power to control. And if private schools were to become subject to public control, they would lose their unique character.

IT IS BECOMING CLEAR that aid to private schools may become as important a public policy issue in the 1980s as civil rights was in the 1960s, and it is more than a curiosity that these two issues are bracketed by two major studies conducted by James Coleman. In the first Coleman report in 1966, his central finding was that what makes a difference in education is the student body, not the building, curriculum, level of funding, or organization. This finding was used to justify and encourage the end of racial isolation.

The second and most recent Coleman report, however, presents us with striking evidence that certain things do matter, that in fact there are differences between good and bad schools, and the differences make a difference. That this finding should be surprising is itself a surprise, because discerning teachers, students, and parents have always known that some schools are better than others, and all things being equal, it is better to go to a good school than a bad one. If there are quality differences among schools, it is no longer a matter of indifference as to which school one goes. And someone must choose: a parent, a student, or a bureaucrat. In fact, Coleman finds that in certain circumstances private schools do a better job academically than comparable public schools. Thus, Coleman, who provided arguments on behalf of compulsory busing for 15 years, now provides a rationale for choice.

While vouchers and tax credits are frequently discussed in the same breath, there are some differences worth noting.

In modern times, vouchers were first seriously proposed by Nobel laureate and conservative economist Milton Friedman. (John Stuart Mill, ever the libertarian, supported vouchers most enthusiastically. Afraid that public schools would be used to "standardize" children, he wrote what remains as vouchers' most stirring defense.) In the late 1960s, vouchers were adopted as a war-on-poverty strategy by democratic socialist Christopher Jencks in the closing days of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. The task of implementation fell to the Nixon administration, but vouchers quietly faded under President Gerald R. Ford, sinking without a trace under President Jimmy Carter. Given President Ronald Reagan's interest in the subject, however, it now appears that the report of the death of vouchers was premature.

What is it we know about vouchers? Are they so much snake oil, a threat to our system of free public education, or might they trigger revitalization and rejuvenation of a faltering public enterprise?

Although there are no elementary and secondary school voucher systems in this country, the federal government did sponsor voucher research for nearly a decade. After several years of planning, in the spring of 1971 a serious effort was made to launch a series of five multi-year voucher demonstration projects under the aegis of the old Office of Economic Opportunity. But even the idea of a demonstration project was viewed as so radical that only one school district in the nation accepted federal funds to serve as a demonstration site. The project, tried in the Alum Rock Union school district in San Jose, California, was severely limited, making it difficult to form judgments about vouchers in general.

For example, because of California constitutional constraints, no private schools joined the Alum Rock project and no teachers' jobs were at risk, so there is no real information on what might happen in a more "competitive" education market. In addition, poor children received extra-value vouchers to provide the resources to give them enrichment programs and to make them "attractive" to schools. Finally, schools could not charge more tuition than the value of the voucher. Nevertheless, the project was surrounded by intense anxiety and extensive publicity.

Why anxiety and publicity? Because of the explosive word *vouchers*. If Alum Rock had been presented as an open-enrollment experiment, it would enter the annals of forgotten federal projects. But in a "voucher" experiment, emotions ran so high that the local teachers' associations disaffiliated from the statewide association for the first year of the project. For vouchers, taken seriously, represent a measured assault on the status quo. They assert that private decisions are better than public, that parents know as much about the welfare of their children as educators, that choice and diversity are to be preferred to the "common core" of the existing system. Thus, even though the Alum Rock project was an attenuated voucher system, the actors in the project—teachers, parents, administrators, school board members—behaved as though it were a real test of the concept. This intensity of reaction in a carefully controlled demonstration project provides some insight into the emotional and political reactions that discussion of vouchers provokes.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, in a moment of prescience observed more than a decade ago that the voucher omelette, once made, cannot be unscrambled. And that is the essence of the issue. This homespun comment on the federal government's attempt to experiment with vouchers was precisely on target. There are two reasons that Shanker's observation was correct and anxiety ran high in Alum Rock—and why no other school district would try vouchers, even with the promise of sizable federal funds. First, education is not a game. It is a serious business. Johnny and Suzie each go around once. The sequence from kindergarten to postgraduate school is not something to be tampered with lightly. The stakes are real, and they are high. Parents know it, and teachers know it.

The second reason is more profound but less obvious: Education is embedded in a political process. Any enterprise that commands more than one-half of most state budgets and is the principal activity of local elected officials is up to its neck in politics. It may not be partisan, it may not be ideological, but it is a central part of the ebb and flow of the political process. And no one is going to be able to "experiment" with a system that requires political actors to relinquish voluntarily their responsibility and control. Imagine asking a teachers' union leader, an elected school board official, an appointed public school superintendent, a mayor or city councilmember to step aside for five years to permit a government agency to pass out vouchers and watch what happens.

Education Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits

Education vouchers for elementary and secondary schools are simply an instrumentality to achieve broad public policy objectives. By themselves they are no more than a certificate authorizing payment of public funds for services rendered; they are no different, functionally, than the travel vouchers most employees in bureaucracies are accustomed to dealing with. In higher education, their most familiar incarnation is the GI Bill.

Their use (or abuse) would be determined by whatever system is adopted to implement them. Thus, Milton Friedman's voucher plan is *laissez faire* (with few government controls), while the voucher systems designed by Christopher Jencks and John Coons are to be carefully regulated by government. In those countries in which voucher-like systems are in place—most notably Holland and Australia—government oversight is comprehensive, although not unduly intrusive.

Although negative transfer payments through the tax code—tax credits or deductions—would aid private education (in that way they are similar to vouchers), they are likely to be less obtrusive. They involve only checking a box on a tax form, and would not necessarily lead to government regulation of schools. Because most private schools are tax-exempt organizations, they are already subject to Internal Revenue Service oversight.

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Any decision to go forward with vouchers, then, cannot be defended or justified as research and development. If vouchers are tried at all, they will be tried as a serious policy alternative to the way in which schooling is financed in this country, not as an experiment or demonstration program.

What is the prognosis if a voucher system is adopted, and does research offer any guidance? Unfortunately, the only honest answer is, "It all depends." It depends on what kind of voucher system is installed, whose purposes it is designed to serve, and what the longer-term unanticipated consequences turn out to be. This is so because there is no single voucher system: Vouchers may be lightly or closely regulated; they may permit wide latitude for parental choice; and they may permit or discourage out-of-pocket supplemental payments for more than the value of the voucher. To illustrate, return to Alum Rock. Conceived of in the heyday of the War on Poverty, it was a last great power-to-the-people program. Parents would reassert their rightful place, the argument ran. Using vouchers, they would choose from among diverse offerings what was best for their children. Teachers and administrators would assume their proper role as providers of service, not as management and workers in a public monopoly.

What really happened? As the superintendent ruefully described it, "power devolved from the board to the superintendent, bypassed the principals, and stopped with the teachers, never reaching the parents." What had begun as a parent-power program became a teacher-power program. And why not? Teachers have the organizational skills, the occupational opportunity, and the professional incentives to run voucher schools according to their lights. Parents, with other demands on their time, were only too happy to leave school decisions to the professionals.

For the first time in recent history, then, there is a realistic possibility of public aid to private schools. Not because they are weak, but because they are strong.

In the 1980s the question of vouchers cannot be raised without at the same time raising the question of tax credits, but the question of tax credits is even more problematic than vouchers because there is very limited experience with them in the field of education. As a generic concept, economists, liberal as well as conservative, view tax credits as a device to stimulate socially desirable behavior that would otherwise be subject to sluggish demand. Energy tax credits are a case in point. A homeowner taxpayer who weather-strips, insulates, or installs storm windows can reduce his federal tax liability by as much as $300. California taxpayers who install solar heating devices can claim a handsome credit on their state income tax as well. Similarly, working parents of young children can claim a daycare tax credit against their federal tax liability.

In each case the credit is designed to stimulate and reward behavior that serves the public good. In the case of education, however, the subject of tax credits raises second-order issues directly. While supporters and opponents agree that tax credits would stimulate demand for private education, they disagree strongly about the desirability of such an effect. Opponents, for example, see tax credits as an elitist raid on the treasury and a threat to public schools, while supporters see them as a response to a pluralistic society in which private education deserves public assistance.

While it is hard to imagine a simpler or more direct system of government support for elementary and secondary private schooling – the whole transaction takes place on individual tax forms – its potential impact on the relationship between the public and private sector is not as clear. Suppose, for example, a credit of $500 were available for every full-time student, kindergarten through postgraduate degree candidate. A family with two students in private school paying tuition of $500 per year for each child could claim a $1000 credit, and so on, up to the limit of the family's tax liability and the actual expense of schooling.

For many families, education tax credits would significantly reduce their income tax liability, but the very poor or the very rich who escape taxes – those with no qualifying education expenses and those who send their children to public schools, there would be no benefit. But for the taxpayer with qualifying education expenses, tax credits would represent a boon.

Although tax credits might drive up tuition, they would have no direct effect on the way most private schools are organized and operated. As private, not-for-profit corporations, private schools are already subject to internal revenue service scrutiny, and tax credits should not materially affect the status quo. As it is, in most jurisdictions, private schools are lightly regulated: They may organize as they wish; they may hire, fire, pay their staff as they will (and the market permits); they may select students on their own terms; and they may offer any curriculum, including religious instruction, that they think appropriate.

The principal policy question raised by tax credits is the extent to which they would influence behavior. Would more and different children attend private school if tax credits were enacted? It is difficult to predict. The larger the tax credit, the greater the prospect that large numbers of children would move to private schools. Like the self-fulfilling prophecy of the Laffer Curve, which predicts zero revenue at both zero and 100 percent tax rates, small tax credits would have almost no effect on behavior, while a 100 percent credit would presumably produce a major impact. At what point in the size of the tax credit behavior begins to change no one can forecast with certainty.

A recent study, just concluded by the staff of the National Commission on School Finance, has assembled some extraordinarily interesting data on this question. Based on a household sample, preliminary evidence suggests that fairly substantial movement to private schools would occur even with a small tax credit; and that the movement would be heaviest among low-income, minority families, precisely the audience education reformers are most concerned with.

This, of course, should come as no surprise: Upper-income, majority families have long enjoyed the luxury of choice, and as the poor would emulate the rich in other areas, so would they with education. As well, middle-class minorities, when income is controlled for, are equally or over-represented in private schools. Given the choice, there is every reason to believe that poor minority students would at least consider the option encouraged by vouchers or tax credits.

Adding credence to this view is Gallup Poll data on attitudes toward education. Asked to assign schools a letter grade, two strong trends emerge among respondents for more than a decade. First, residents of towns and villages still give their public schools good marks: To them, at least, small is beautiful. Second, that group of the population that consistently gives public schools their lowest marks are inner-city blacks. Without old-boy networks and family fortunes to inherit, inner-city minorities have more riding on good education than any other members of American society.

The final bit of information from the Gallup Poll is the consequence of a most curious but revealing question: Would you favor a voucher system? In 1983, for the first time in history, more than 50 percent of the respondents reported that they would.

TAKEN TOGETHER, then, there is every reason to believe that vouchers or tax credits would have exactly the effect one expects: Private school enrollments would increase and public school enrollments would decrease. There is a fine bit of irony in this because proponents of tax credit and voucher schemes have got themselves in a very difficult tangle: To moderate the opposition (particularly the professional education associations), they have argued that there would be little or no switching to private schools. The public schools would be safe. To argue this way is a course of desperation. First, it doesn't for a minute convince public school supporters; they are in a perfect panic about losing students. Second, it exposes supporters of these public aid schemes to charges that public aid is simply a windfall to those families who already have their children enrolled in private schools.

It is interesting that these research findings should converge with these policy views in 1984, because it is inconceivable that the Congress will support tax credits as they have been presented in this economic environment; no one is willing to vote for even bigger deficits, which is what tax credits represent in their present incarnation.

The argument that would make tax credits financially palatable makes them politically unacceptable: Credits will save money. But they will do so only if some large number of children transfer from public to private school. And so long as the value of the tax credit is less than the cost of keeping the student in public school, there will be savings.

Thus, the argument that could gain supporters worried about spiraling deficits and increasing government outlays is the same argument that will give the education associations apoplexy.

An altogether different policy question is raised by vouchers, and that is the extent to which private schools would come under some measure of public control. Even in the most lightly regulated voucher system, a voucher bureaucracy would be empowered to police it. One of the principal events in the Alum Rock project was the transformation of the existing public school bureaucracy into a voucher bureaucracy to oversee and operate the new system. Tax credits, on the other hand, would leave the status quo intact. Because a tax credit is claimed by checking a box on a form and completing the necessary arithmetic, government's role would be limited to additional tax clerks. In fact, tax credit legislation will be heard by the tax committees rather than education committees of the state legislatures or congress. If enacted, it will be administered by tax rather than education departments.

It is this remarkable simplicity that makes tax credits so attractive to private elementary and secondary school supporters. In contrast to the complexity and intrusiveness of voucher systems, tax credits are straightforward, easy to understand, and easy to use.

WHILE VOUCHERS AND TAX CREDITS differ in important ways, together they raise profound questions about the role of government in educating elementary and secondary school-age children. As a society we provide substantial public funding for both public and private postsecondary education. The question before us today is whether or not public support should be provided for private elementary and secondary education as well.

The claims and counterclaims about tax credits and vouchers cannot be put to rest by the presentation of objective evidence, because the decision that policymakers will be asked to make goes beyond the purview of social science. It goes to our political and social core: Should private values and private organizational forms be encouraged, or should our social and political energies continue to be directed toward public institutions? Is private virtue consonant with public virtue? The question raised by tax credits and vouchers is at once that simple and that sweeping. ■

About the Author

Denis P. Doyle is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research in Washington, D.C. Previously he has served as director of planning and program coordination for the Office of the Assistant Secretary, Office of Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, and as assistant director, education finance, at the National Institute of Education.

The Consequences of School Choice: Who Leaves and Who Stays in the Inner City*

Valerie J. Martinez, *University of North Texas*

R. Kenneth Godwin, *University of North Texas*

Frank R. Kemerer, *University of North Texas*

Laura Perna, *The University of Michigan*

Objective. A naturally occurring experiment in both public and private school choice is examined to identify who the choosing families are and how they differ both from one another and from families whose children remain in attendance zone public schools. The studied population is largely Latino and almost entirely low-income. *Methods.* Multivariate techniques are employed to model the characteristics of the choosing families. *Results.* The models reveal that public and private choosers have much in common, including mother's education and high parental involvement. Choosing parents have significantly higher educational expectations for their children than nonchoosing parents. *Conclusions.* The findings indicate that, before a child reaches school age, parents should receive information about the benefits of education and choice options. Choice programs will increase or decrease equality of opportunity depending on program design.

Despite growing interest in letting parents decide the schools their children will attend, scholars know little about the characteristics of choosing and nonchoosing families. Because many of the benefits and harms of choice programs depend upon who leaves attendance zone public schools, critical questions for public policy are, "Which families will choose alternatives to attendance zone schools if they may only choose among public schools?" and "Which families will choose private schools under a voucher plan?" In this study, we employ a naturally occurring experiment in both public and private school choice to examine who the choosing families are and how they differ both from one another and from families whose children remain in attendance

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* Direct all correspondence to Valerie Martinez, Department of Political Science, University of North Texas, Denton, TX 76203-5338. This research was supported, in part, by a Field-Initiated Studies Program Grant, #R117E30059, from the U.S. Department of Education. Any findings, conclusions, or recommendations herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education. We wish to thank Frank Feigert and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts on this paper. Editor's note: Reviewers were John E. Chubb and Jeff Henig.

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zone schools. We employ multivariate techniques to model the characteristics of choosing families, most of whom are low-income Latinos.

The Choice Debate and Past Research

Choice program supporters predict that parents will match their children's talents and interests with program characteristics if schools offer a variety of curricula and families can select their children's schools. Parents will become involved in their children's education, forcing schools to be more responsive to parent demands, ultimately leading to increased student learning (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Meier, 1991). Opponents of choice contend that most parents will not make choices among schools in ways that will improve their children's academic opportunities (Wells, 1993; Willms and Echols, 1992; Driscoll, 1993). Parents with limited education will experience the greatest difficulties in evaluating school quality (Bridge, 1978; Catterall, 1992; Wells and Crain, 1992). Levin (1989) further contended that parents also will make choices that increase social stratification in society. To what extent do empirical data support or reject these contentions?

Public School Choice. Comprehensive assessments of public school choice programs are rare. The Rand Corporation's early 1970s study of the Alum Rock School District's experiment with alternative schools in San Jose, California, revealed increased levels of involvement among high socioeconomic families, a trend toward racially balanced schools, parental preference for neighborhood schools, and positive attitudes by participating parents (Weiler et al., 1974). However, no significant differences emerged between choosing and nonchoosing students in terms of reading achievement, perceptions of self and others, or social skills (Capell, 1981). Similar conclusions were drawn from a later short-lived public choice program in Richmond, California (Chriss, Nash, and Stern, 1992).

Great Britain adopted a choice program in 1979 that allowed all students to attend any public school. A study of students in Scotland showed that parents with high socioeconomic status were more likely to exercise choice, sending their children to schools with similar higher status children (Willms and Echols, 1992). The study also shows that—after controlling for family characteristics, aptitude test scores, and school socioeconomic composition—changes in standardized test scores of students who chose alternatives to attendance zone schools did not differ from the scores of students who remained in their neighborhood schools.

The most celebrated public choice system is in District No. 4, East Harlem, New York City. After other reforms failed to improve attendance and performance, school personnel designed new thematic schools and sought out interested parents. By 1990 there were 32 thematic schools (Fliegel, 1993). Dropout rates decreased and test score performance improved. However, the absence of statistical controls for student attrition and migration into the district of more qualified students casts doubt upon the magnitude of the improvements (Clune, 1990; Kirp, 1992).

Minnesota implemented an open enrollment option in 1990, allowing students to attend any public school in the state, provided racial balance is unaffected. Higher socioeconomic status and rural families were more likely to take advantage of the option to change schools. However, less than 1 percent of the eligible population participated in the program (Rubenstein, Hamar, and Adelman, 1992).

Currently, magnet schools represent the most common public choice option. Conceived as an inducement to school integration, magnet schools enroll an average of 20 percent of high school students in large urban districts (Blank, 1990). They mix students from across attendance zones who generally have higher talents and skills than do students at average attendance-zone schools in the district. Lacking open admissions, they tend to underrepresent low-income, black, Latino, bilingual, and low-test-score students (Blair, 1985; Price, 1985; Moore and Davenport, 1990; Blank, 1990; Chriss, Nash, and Stern, 1992).

In summary, research concerning existing public school choice programs indicates that the fears of choice opponents that school choice will increase existing socioeconomic and academic segregation among schools may be valid. Would private school choice exacerbate or help solve this problem?

Private School Choice. Proponents of public vouchers for private schools assert that, to stimulate meaningful reform, choice programs must include private schools to provide a wide range of options and to ensure sufficient competition with public schools. Private schools currently enjoy some advantages over public schools because, on average, parents of private school students are better educated, have more stable homes, value education more, and give greater attention to learning (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982). These factors encourage learning directly through parents' influence on their children and indirectly through the contextual effect of attending a school where the student body values education more and has higher educational aspirations. If vouchers were available to all, would private schools continue to enjoy these advantages?

The belief that private schools outperform public schools because of institutional characteristics is hotly contested (Rasell and Rothstein, 1993) and is an important component of the school voucher debate. However, we focus on two threshold questions: Which students and families would take advantage of a publicly funded voucher program?

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and What factors affect that choice? To answer these questions, we must know how much parents of different income levels are willing to pay to exercise choice and the reasons families choose private schools.

The 1992 Nobel Prize in economics went to Gary Becker for his pioneering study of family economics (Becker, 1981). Becker's research has particular importance in education, arguing that the amount of time and money parents invest in each child strongly influences educational achievement and hypothesizing that parents will trade off quality and quantity in their investment in children. If this is correct, then parents with fewer children will spend more of their own resources for educational objectives. Consequently, partial vouchers will discriminate against children with many siblings. Research concerning Becker's models has found that parents with fewer children and greater spacing between them invest more time and money in each child, significantly increasing educational achievement (Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding, 1991; Hanushek, 1992).

Becker also contended that parents may choose among educational alternatives to obtain "merit goods" such as religious and ethical values and ethnic traditions. This suggests that parents may pay for private schools even if they do not expect greater academic quality in the private school.

Until recently, no empirical research existed concerning the question of how large a voucher must be to be equitable. The Milwaukee Voucher Program is the only publicly funded school voucher plan that pays all expenses for students attending private schools. Enacted in 1989, it provides vouchers to low-income students in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) to attend nonsectarian private schools. During the first two years of the program, 75 percent of the participating students were African American and 20 percent were Latino. Educational quality and disciplinary environment were the leading reasons parents cited for participating (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn, 1993).

Early findings revealed that the majority of students entering the Milwaukee program were characterized by low academic achievement and discipline problems (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn, 1993). Thus, the program did not skim off the best students but served the targeted group. Compared with MPS low-income families, participating families were more likely to be receiving AFDC or general assistance and to be headed by a single parent. Despite their economic status, choice parents reported higher education levels and placed greater importance on education than their MPS counterparts. Choice parents were highly involved in their children's schools, but there was little change in student achievement.

The Milwaukee study showed that it is possible to design a publicly funded voucher program encouraging low-income students to enroll in private schools. However, the design of the Milwaukee program limits the generalizability of its findings. Students can enroll only in nonsectarian schools, a significant limitation considering that 86 percent of private schools nationally are religiously affiliated (Cooper, 1988). Further, because the program pays all expenses including transportation, it cannot tell us whether a partial voucher would lead to substantial participation by low-income families.

Lankford and Wyckoff (1992) and Manski (1992) separately developed simulation models to estimate the impacts of school vouchers. Lankford and Wyckoff concluded that dropping tuition to zero would move students with above-average income into private schools and that these students would be similar to currently attending students. They estimated that only about 15 percent of public school students would switch. In Manski's simulations, enrollment in private schools increased with parental income and education, and the proportion of highly motivated students in the public schools fell, especially in poor communities.

In summary, existing evidence concerning school choice suggests that choosing families are different from nonchoosing families in that they tend to be better educated, and more positive about and more interested in their children's schools. But it is unclear why families choose and whether vouchers would change the student body characteristics of private schools.

A Naturally Occurring Experiment: School Choice in San Antonio, Texas

San Antonio is a natural laboratory for answering many questions concerning public and private school choice. In 1992 the Children's Educational Opportunity (CEO) Foundation offered partial scholarships to low-income children, grades 1–8, who wished to attend a private school or a public school in another district. The San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) already had a thematic school choice program.

The CEO program offers scholarships to students who qualify for federally assisted school lunches. These scholarships cover half of a school's tuition, with a $750 maximum. While low by standards in many parts of the country, the CEO scholarship has real value in San Antonio where the average elementary school tuition is less than $1,500. Contributions from corporations in the San Antonio area underwrite the CEO program and guarantee continued funding for three years. Program students are predominantly Latino.

In September 1992 CEO provided scholarships to approximately 900 students. CEO allocates 50 percent of the scholarships to families who are enrolling their children in private schools for the first time and the rest to eligible families whose children were enrolled in private schools prior to the creation of the CEO program. Within these two categories, CEO selects recipients on a first-come, first-chosen basis. Approximately 60 percent enrolled in Catholic schools, 30 percent in mainstream Protestant schools, 9 percent in other denominational schools, and 1 percent in nonsectarian schools. The scholarship program is heavily oversubscribed, but the 822 students on the waiting list are already enrolled in private schools.

SAISD enrolls 61,156 students, 80 percent Latino, 12 percent African American, and 7 percent Anglo. Approximately 80 percent receive reduced-price meals. A multilingual thematic program of foreign language instruction combined with traditional curricula begins in the sixth grade. Students apply in the fifth grade and are admitted on the basis of superior academic performance. For the 1992–93 school year SAISD admitted 675 students to the multilingual program and rejected 307 students, mostly because of insufficient space.

We first compare choosing families (those who applied to either choice program), with families who did not apply to a choice program. We then compare those who chose the public school multilingual program with those who chose a private school.

Hypotheses. Previous studies have suggested that the probability of being a choosing family is positively associated with (1) parents' education, (2) family income, (3) parental employment, (4) two-parent household, (5) relative importance of education, (6) parental expectation for the child's educational achievement, (7) parental involvement in the child's school, (8) parental participation in the child's education at home, and (9) the child's academic performance. We expect the probability of being a chooser to be negatively associated with (10) the family receiving federal assistance and (11) the number of children in the family. We hypothesize that two factors distinguish public and private choosing families: (1) the importance of religious values to the family and (2) the level of dissatisfaction with public schools.

Data. In August–September 1992 we sent mail questionnaires to four groups of choosing families. Those whose children (1) applied to and enrolled in the public multilingual program; (2) applied to the multilingual program but could not enroll due to limited enrollment space; (3) received CEO scholarships and enrolled in private schools; and (4) were already in private schools, applied to the CEO program, and were placed on the waiting list. We provided English and Spanish versions of the questionnaires. A second mailing and follow-up telephone calls to nonrespondents resulted in an average response rate of 48.5 percent (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Sample Size, Response Rate, and Percentage of Total Respondents for Family Groups

Family Groups	Sample Size	Completed Surveys	Response Rate	Percentage of Total Respondents
Choosers				
CEO participants	900	608	68	22
CEO waiting list	822	270	33	10
Multilingual participants	675	336	50	12
Multilingual waiting list	307	97	32	3
Total for choosers	2,704	1,311	48	49
Nonchoosers				
SAISD	3,470	1,375	40	51
Total number of families	6,174	2,686	43	100

Although the response rates may seem low, they are higher than average for mail surveys to comparable groups (Marín and Marín, 1991). To identify possible sample bias, we compared survey respondents with the applicant population[1] on key demographic variables and found only two statistically significant differences: Latinos and working mothers were underrepresented among survey respondents. We note those instances when sample bias might change the inferences drawn from the survey results.

In addition, we surveyed by phone a random sample of nonchoosing families (i.e., SAISD families whose children attended neighborhood schools).[2] Using bilingual interviewers, we obtained a response rate of 40 percent.[3] A demographic comparison of these respondents with SAISD family data and 1990 census data for San Antonio indicates no significant sample bias (Gadberry and Salínas, 1994).

The survey instruments elicited standard socioeconomic and demographic information as well as opinions regarding children's past educational experiences, extent of parental involvement with children's education, and importance of education relative to other values and goals. Questionnaires to choice families also elicited information about how families learned of the program and factors they considered when making the decision.[4]

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[1] Applicant information provided by CEO and SAISD.

[2] The sample was stratified by grades 1–8.

[3] Our response rate reflects the lack of funds which limited our callback ability to three attempts. We actually had only four refusals among those we successfully contacted.

Measures. To determine whether choosing and nonchoosing families differ, we look at four sets of characteristics: (1) basic socioeconomic and demographic attributes of the children and their parents, including possible stress factors, such as unemployment; (2) indicators of family values, such as the importance of maintaining religious and ethnic traditions; (3) measures of parental involvement in education, such as frequency with which parents help children with homework; and (4) variables related directly to child's education, such as parental satisfaction with the attendance zone school.[5]

Our analysis first uses difference-of-means tests to determine whether the differences between choosing and nonchoosing families, as well as the differences between public choosing and private choosing families, reach statistical significance. Next, we use multivariate techniques (probit regression and path analysis) to separately identify which factors best predict and explain who chooses public programs and who selects private schools.

Results

Nonchoosing and Choosing Families. The first and second columns in Table 2 show the mean scores of nonchoosing and choosing families. Choosing families differ significantly from nonchoosing families on almost every variable. The difference of means tests confirm all expectations concerning parental education, income, marital status, and number of children in the family. As expected, choosers also value education more than materialistic goals such as income and employment, and place a higher value on both religious and ethnic values and traditions. The data show that choosers are much more involved in their child's education both at home and at school. Also, students from choosing families score much higher on standardized tests than students from nonchoosing families.

Public versus Private Choosers. In what ways do families that choose public and private school alternatives differ? Table 2 indicates that private school choosers have significantly higher education than public school choosers and mothers of private school choosers are less likely to work outside the home. On all other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, public and private choosers resemble each other more than either group resembles nonchoosing families.

As we hypothesize, private choosing families place greater stress on

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[4] Survey instruments were adapted from those used by Witte (1991, 1993).

[5] A complete listing of variables and their measures is available from the authors upon request.

TABLE 2

Mean Scores for Characteristics of Nonchoosers, All Choosers, Public Choosers, and Private School Choosers

Variables	Nonchoosers	All Choosers	Public Choosers	Private Choosers
Demographic characteristics				
Female parent education	2.82	4.15***	3.74	4.32***
Male parent education	2.89	4.11***	3.81	4.24***
Family income	4.22	4.53***	4.71	4.45
Female parent employment	.35	.48***	.57	.45***
Male parent employment	.73	.89***	.80	.80
Receiving federal assistance	.35	.15***	.16	.15
Two-parent family	.48	.61***	.61	.61
Number of children	3.51	2.92***	3.00	2.90
Gender of student	1.38	1.56***	1.65	1.53
Anglo	.03	.14***	.06	.18***
Latino	.82	.71**	.73	.71
African American	.10	.08	.14	.06***
Family values				
Material goals versus education	3.99	4.42***	4.50	4.40
Educational expectations	3.47	4.43***	4.43	4.43
Importance of religion	1.58	1.90***	1.80	1.95***
Importance of ethnic values	1.50	1.67***	1.60	1.70**
Religious attendance	2.41	2.87***	2.46	3.03***
Parental involvement in education				
Help at home with schoolwork	5.43	7.29***	5.23	8.15***
School contact index	4.01	4.80***	3.05	5.53***
Activity in child's school	1.85	2.77***	1.98	3.09***
Child's education				
Child's test score	62.10	102.83***	109.60	93.14***
Evaluation of past school	3.18	3.08***	3.44	2.33***[a]
N	1,375	1,311	433	878

[a] Includes only those CEO families who moved from public to private schools ($N = 262$).

**$p < .01$ (one-tailed test).

***$p < .001$ (one-tailed test).

religious and ethnic values. This difference is particularly marked in religious attendance; public school choosers parallel nonchoosers more closely than private school choosers.

The most surprising differences between these groups are in parental involvement in the child's education. Private school choosers are far more likely to help their child with educational activities at home, to contact their child's school, and to involve themselves in school activities. In the areas of help at home and school contact, public school choosers not only score lower than private school choosers, they score lower than nonchoosers! The presence of students in lower grades among the private school families accounts for some of the differences in parental involvement.

Even greater than these differences is the disparity between parents' evaluations of their child's previous attendance zone school. Public choosers rate their child's attendance zone school higher than nonchoosers, while private choosers show substantial dissatisfaction with public schools. This suggests that public choosers are not so much escaping the problems of attendance zone schools as they are taking advantage of an educational opportunity. Private school choosers clearly wish to leave the public school system; the CEO scholarship gives them the chance.

Public school choosing students score significantly higher on standardized tests than do private school choosing students. This is not surprising since standardized tests constitute a major component of eligibility for the multilingual program and the CEO program has no academic requirement for eligibility.[6]

A comparison between CEO students who previously attended public schools and those previously enrolled in private schools supports the simulation model of Lankford and Wyckoff (1992:333). Differences of means tests show that parents who used the CEO scholarship to transfer their children from public to private schools have significantly more education than those receiving the scholarship who had previously enrolled their children in private schools (t value = 2.89). On all other characteristics the new private school families seem almost identical to those CEO families who chose private schools prior to the scholarship availability.

Multivariate Analyses. To determine relative importance of variables in the choice process, we use probit regression to predict and path analysis to explain who chooses public and private schools. The selection criteria of the two programs truncate choice and prevent the specification of a trichotomous choice model where families choose among attendance zone, multilingual, and preferred private schools. The multilingual program limits choice to fifth grade students and only those in the top 20 percent of their class may apply. CEO also truncates choice by limiting scholarships to those who qualify for federally assisted school lunches. Because the programs limit choice in such different ways, we estimate the two sets of choosers independently and then discuss their similarities and differences.

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[6] Although the CEO program itself does not have academic eligibility requirements, some of the private schools do. Our analysis of those students who received scholarships found that few applicants were turned down by the school of their choice.

Public School Choice. We compare all families of students who applied to the multilingual program with our random sample of nonchoosing families. We began by taking all the Table 2 variables as independent. The first column in Table 3 shows the five variables that ultimately had statistically significant direct impacts on public school choice. The regression model shows that standardized test scores are the single best predictor of who will choose the multilingual program. Other such variables are mother's education, gender of student, parental help at home, and parental expectations about the child's education. The model correctly predicts the choice decision in 84 percent of the cases.

We use path analysis to better understand how the variables that show significant relationships relate to that choice. Figure 1 shows the results of this analysis. Two variables stand out because of their centrality to all other variables in the model: mother's education and parental expectations. Mother's education has a direct impact on choice, and it indirectly affects choice through parents' participation in the child's education at home, educational expectations, and child's test scores. In addition to the direct effect that high parental expectations have on choice, they indirectly affect choice through parents' participation in the child's education at home and test scores. Being a female student has both a direct effect and an indirect effect through educational expectations. Being Latino negatively affects choice through its impact on mother's education.

Private School Choice. Again using Table 2 variables, we estimated the model for private school choice. To better model the initial decision process, we limited our analysis to those families who moved from public to private schools and nonchoosing families. The second column of Table 3 shows results of this analysis. Religious attendance, our surrogate measure of the importance of religion, and dissatisfaction with the previous public school are critical prediction variables. Mother's education, educational expectations, parental activity at the child's school, being female, and being Anglo are also important predictors. Receiving federal assistance has a small negative impact on private choice. This model correctly predicts 90 percent of the cases.

Figure 2 diagrams how variables relate to each other. The major differences between the public and private choice models reflect the replacement of standardized test scores by religiosity and dissatisfaction with the public school.

Summary and Conclusions

The public and private choice programs in San Antonio demonstrate that low-income, inner-city, minority families want alternatives to attendance zone schools. Each is heavily oversubscribed. Public choice

TABLE 3

Probit Estimates of the Effects of Selected Variables on the Probability of Choosing Multilingual Program and Private Schools

	Probit Coefficients (t Ratios in Parentheses)	
Variables	Multilingual Program[a]	Private Schools[b]
Female student	0.66*** (4.85)	0.16* (2.27)
Mother's education	0.17*** (3.93)	0.20*** (6.60)
Educational expectation for child	0.37*** (4.81)	0.30*** (6.85)
Child's 1992 standardized test scores	0.04*** (11.53)	n.s.
Parental help at home	0.07** (3.78)	n.s.
Anglo	n.s.	0.77*** (3.72)
Religious attendance	n.s.	0.37*** (11.43)
Dissatisfaction with previous public school	n.s.	0.15*** (8.96)
Parental activity at school	n.s.	0.22*** (5.34)
Family on federal assistance	n.s.	−0.32* (−2.42)
N	677	1,559
Cases of choosing families	353	262
Correctly predicted	84%	90%
Pseudo R^2	.50	.50

[a] Includes families of multilingual program participants and families of students on the program's waiting list plus nonchoosing families with children in grades 5–8.

[b] Includes only those CEO families who moved from public to private schools plus nonchoosing families.

*$p < .05$ (one-tailed test).

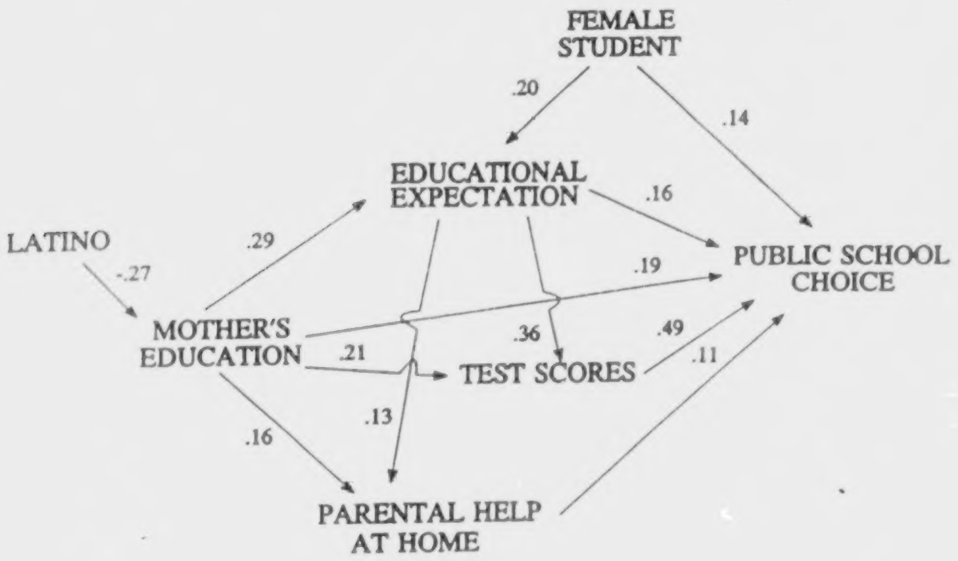
**$p < .01$ (one-tailed test).

***$p < .001$ (one-tailed test).

program popularity—despite the multilingual schools' location in high-risk, low-income neighborhoods—indicates that parents within SAISD want improved educational opportunities for their children.

FIGURE 1

Path Diagram of the Decision to Choose a Public Multilingual School



Private school enrollment of almost 20 percent of the students residing in SAISD shows that many poor families are willing to pay a substantial portion of their income for their children to attend private schools.

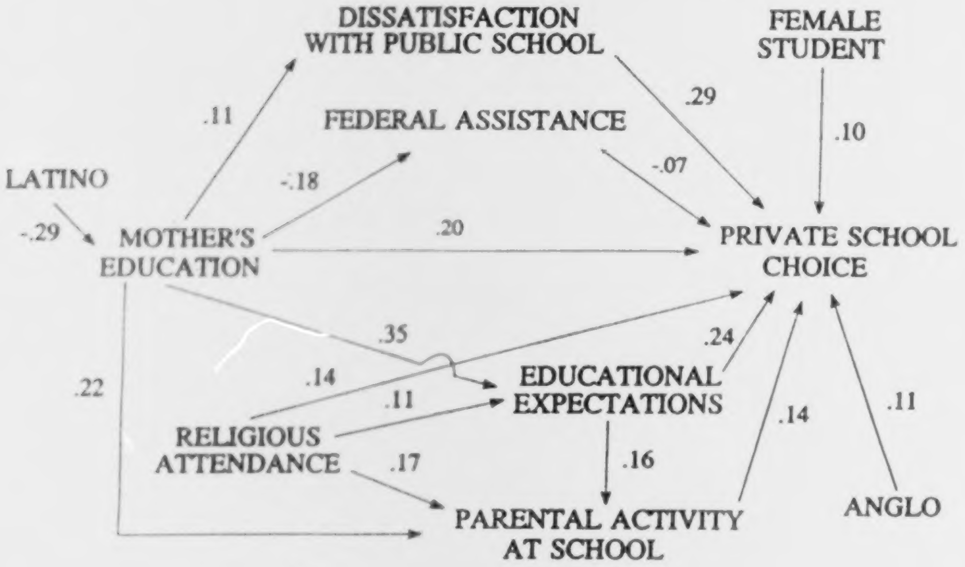
At the same time, it is important to note that the vast majority of CEO applicants were already sending their children to private schools prior to the program's inception. This may be attributable to the CEO initial marketing strategy: notices were placed in San Antonio's major newspaper and delivered to private schools and churches. It may also reflect low demand among public school parents for private school attendance, supporting estimates from Lankford and Wyckoff's (1992) simulation model. In future years, as the CEO program becomes better known, we can better estimate demand for private choice among SAISD families.

Our analysis indicates that public and private choosers have much in common. For both programs, mother's education and parental expectations about children's education substantially affect participation. Female students participate in both programs at higher rates than do male students. In addition, parental involvement in the child's education (manifested as "parental help at home" in the public school model and "parental activity at school" in the private school model) relates positively. In both models, being Latino has an indirect impact on choice through its negative effect on mother's education.

Perhaps most important in terms of its immediate policy implications

FIGURE 2

Path Diagram of the Decision to Choose a Private School


DISSATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL
FEMALE STUDENT
.11
.29
.10
FEDERAL ASSISTANCE
LATINO
-.18
-.07
-.29
MOTHER'S EDUCATION
.20
PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE
.35
.24
.22
.14
EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS
.11
.14
.11
RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE
.17
.16
PARENTAL ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL
ANGLO

is the finding that choosing families have much higher educational expectations for their children and value education significantly more than nonchoosing families. Parents who want more for their children believe they get more by choosing an alternative educational setting. If low-income parents have high expectations and place a high value on education, then they are willing to expend scarce resources on their children's education. This suggests that before a child reaches school age, parents should receive information about the benefits of education and choice options. Given the centrality of mother's education in both models, these efforts should be targeted toward less-educated parents. Such instruction may reduce the disadvantages of children whose mothers do not have high levels of formal education.

Beyond these conclusions the design of San Antonio's two choice programs necessarily limits our ability to generalize. For instance, the public school choice program requires superior academic performance. It is no surprise, therefore, that test scores positively affect participation in the multilingual program. We can set these empirical findings, however, in a broader context by comparing San Antonio private choosers to those in the Milwaukee voucher program. In both cities private choosing parents are more involved in their child's education, have higher educational levels, bear fewer children, and exhibit higher degrees of dissatisfaction with public schools than nonchoosing families. In San Antonio these families are more likely to be two-parent and are less likely to be on federal assistance than nonchoosers. Opposite relationships occur in Milwaukee (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn, 1993). CEO private choice students tend to score higher than nonchoosing students on standardized tests, whereas Milwaukee's private choice students score lower than nonchoosers. More importantly, the CEO program is oversubscribed whereas the Milwaukee program is undersubscribed.

The presence of a sectarian school option combined with high levels of religious attendance among private school choosers in San Antonio could explain this difference. The exclusion of sectarian schools in the cost-free Milwaukee program probably contributes to its being undersubscribed by reducing the supply of schooling options and reducing demand from parents who want to enroll their children in religious schools.

In summary, our analyses of both public and private choice programs in San Antonio support past studies of public choice programs and simulations of private choice programs. When compared with nonchoosing families in the SAISD, public and private school choosing families are more involved in their child's education both at home and at school, are better educated, are employed at higher rates, and are less likely to be receiving federal assistance than nonchoosing families. Choice applicants have significantly higher standardized test scores than nonchoosing students. What are the implications of these findings for public policy?

Rasell and Rothstein (1993) argued that the first question about school choice is, "Does it promote equality of opportunity?" (p. 3). We believe that choice programs increase or decrease equality of opportunity depending on program design. If the goal of a state's choice program is to increase equality of opportunity to participate across income and ethnic groups, then the plan should allow students to choose any school regardless of the school district. If the goal is to empower inner-city parents by giving them choice opportunities enjoyed by higher-income families, sectarian as well as nonsectarian private schools must be included.[7] Both public and private choice programs should pay transportation and information costs, at least for low-income parents. To prevent choice from increasing socioeconomic segregation, the state should require quotas of low-income students for all schools that accept publicly funded vouchers.

Future research should focus on the features of choice programs that promote equality of opportunity and have a positive effect on student learning and parental involvement. This will require parallel analyses of choice programs with different features and populations, development of a sharper theory regarding the features that make a difference, and consideration of political conditions that make some programs feasible and sustainable. SSQ

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[7] A problem is that most state constitutions prohibit the expenditure of state funds for sectarian purposes.

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Educational Vouchers: Effectiveness, Choice, and Costs

Henry M. Levin

From Henry M. Levin, "Educational Vouchers: Effectiveness, Choice, and Costs," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1998, pp. 373-392. ©1998 by Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management. Reprinted by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Abstract

Most of the policy discussion on the effects of educational vouchers has been premised on theoretical or ideological positions rather than evidence. This article analyzes a substantial body of recent empirical evidence on achievement differences between public and private schools; on who chooses and its probable impact on educational equity; and on the comparative costs of public and private schools and an overall voucher system. The findings indicate that: (1) results among numerous studies suggest no difference or only a slight advantage for private schools over public schools in student achievement for a given student, but evidence of substantially higher rates of graduation, college attendance, and college graduation for Catholic high school students; (2) evidence is consistent that educational choice leads to greater socioeconomic (SES) and racial segregation of students; and (3) evidence does not support the contention that costs of private schools are considerably lower than those of public schools, but the costs of an overall voucher infrastructure appear to exceed those of the present system.

INTRODUCTION

Since Milton Friedman [1955] proposed his original voucher plan some four decades ago with a wider dissemination in his important book on *Capitalism and Freedom* [Friedman, 1962], the idea has taken on more and more credibility. Frustration with public schools in the inner cities has been a particularly important reason for emerging support of vouchers. Yet, both advocates and detractors tend to argue about the consequences of vouchers more from theoretical and ideological grounds than empirical ones. The purpose of this article is to consider empirical evidence concerning three issues on which there have been strong views expressed in the policy arena: (1) Will vouchers improve student achievement? (2) Who will choose and what are the educational consequences? and (3) What is the evidence on comparative costs of public versus private schools and on the costs of a voucher system?

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It is only fair in addressing these types of issues that I clarify where I stand on vouchers. Three decades ago I argued that the situation of inner-city students was so dire that we ought to be willing to design good experiments with vouchers or voucher-type mechanisms to ascertain their effects on both individual and societal outcomes [Levin, 1968]. In subsequent publications [see, for example, Levin 1980, 1987] I have argued that the specific design of a voucher system with respect to finance, regulation, and information would be crucial in determining specific outcomes rather than leaving the discussion at a generic and abstract level, a point that is also stressed by Moe [1995b]. More recently [Levin, 1991] I have suggested that the private benefits of vouchers are likely to be positive relative to the present system in terms of satisfying narrow consumer preferences, but that the social consequences will be worse because of greater inequality and the further deterioration of a common educational experience as social goals of schooling are sacrificed to consumer sovereignty. In what follows I will not take a stand on vouchers as much as try to read the present evidence on the three aforementioned issues.

DIFFERENCES IN ACHIEVEMENT BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

To a large degree the arguments for educational vouchers have been premised on whether they will improve the educational achievement of students, particularly students from poverty backgrounds and inner cities where school results are considered to be particularly woeful. Because student achievement is considered to be a universal goal of schools, it has become the sine qua non for evaluating school reform. It is important to stress how limited this focus is in the context of market choice. The rationale for market choice in education is to give families the freedom to pursue their own educational preferences. For some families academic achievement will be the prime goal; for others it will be a school environment that is safe and supportive; for others it will be a quest for educational reinforcement of religious or philosophic values. Although most families may have some concern for the academic dimension, it may not be the prime dimension and may even be overwhelmed completely by other school and family goals as systematic studies have shown [Echols and Willms, 1995]. For example, in evangelical Christian schools it appears that preparation for the Kingdom of God far outweighs concerns about academic achievement [Peshkin, 1986]. Thus, comparing the effectiveness of schools only on student achievement is not fully consistent with measuring the impact of vouchers on educational outcomes where families may choose schools according to many criteria. And, even as a measure of social outcome, achievement tests are a limited and highly imperfect sample of the range and depth of knowledge and skills, values, attitudes, and other behaviors that we expect schools to inculcate in the young [Inkeles, 1966].

Comparisons of Public/Private Student Achievement

Nevertheless, the primary focus in comparing public and private schools—even in the absence of vouchers—has been to ascertain whether either sector has an advantage in achievement, net of differences attributable to diversities in student characteristics. It should be noted that controls for self-selection pose problems in that even when controlling for race and indicators of social class of students, families that choose private schools and make a financial effort to pay for them are likely to be more educationally motivated than those that do not. Therefore, we would expect students from such families to have higher achievement than similar students who do not make the efforts to switch from a public to a private school. Whether one can control statistically for this self-selection effect is questionable. Witte [1992] is particularly pessimistic that available measures can adjust for selection bias.

The first major study by Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore [1982] compared a cross section of 10th grade students in public and private (mainly Catholic) schools, controlling for race and socioeconomic background. They found that students in private schools had slightly higher achievement, from 0.12 to 0.29 standard deviation units, depending upon the test. But their results were criticized as overstatements of the private school effects because of inadequate controls for selection bias and other problems in the statistical design [Goldberger and Cain, 1982]. Purported adjustments for some of these problems reduced considerably or eliminated the private school advantages [Willms, 1983].

Longitudinal results based on sophomore-to-senior changes found smaller private school advantages, from a range of no difference to 0.1 standard deviations in achievement [Alexander and Pallas, 1985; Haertel, James, and Levin, 1987; Hoffer, Greeley, and Coleman, 1985; Willms, 1985]. This effect is statistically significant, but small, amounting to only about 10 points or less on the SAT for college admissions—a trivial advantage. Further, it means that the achievement overlap between the two sectors is so great that 46 percent or more of public school students have *higher* achievement than the average private school student who is statistically similar [Levin, 1987, p. 634]. Using earnings equations for 1976 data (the achievement data were collected in 1980), such an achievement advantage translated into earnings gains of less than 5 cents an hour for high school graduates some four years after graduation and about one day less unemployment a year among a cohort that experienced about 50 days of annual unemployment.

More recent statistical studies have also found no differences in achievement or only minimal differences. The most sophisticated studies from a modeling and statistical perspective are those of Goldhaber [1996] and Gamoran [1996]. Goldhaber uses the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS–88) data set and finds no difference in achievement between comparable students in public and private schools [Goldhaber, 1996]. Gamoran's use of the same data set with a different statistical technique, hierarchical linear modeling, also finds no achievement difference or a very slight private school advantage, depending upon which statistical formulation is used. In the few cases where differences are found in favor of private schools, the advantage is not even as large as the trivial differences cited earlier.

When differences are found in such public-private achievement studies, they are often questionable. For example, Sander [1996] used the third survey of the High School and Beyond data done in 1985 based upon students who should have graduated from high school in 1982. He found no difference in achievement between public and Catholic schools for students who attended Catholic schools for one to seven years, and an advantage only for those who had attended Catholic schools for eight years. Not only is it puzzling that the putative Catholic school advantage takes eight years to "bloom" with nary a hint of a bud in the earlier years, but even this result is questionable because it is not based upon an equivalent public school comparison group. When restricting the finding only to those who have attended Catholic school continuously for eight years, it is necessary to compare achievement with an equally stable public school group of students who have not been mobile. School stability has been found to be an important correlate of school success in the general literature [Rumberger and Larson, 1996]. But no attempt was made to compare the achievement of students with eight years of Catholic school (presumably most attending the same school) with a comparable group of public school students who attended the same public school. An appropriate comparison would have been to compare students with the same stable attendance patterns between the two sectors to net out school effects.

In another recent study that models existing data sets to estimate effects of "voucher-type subsidies," Hoxby [1996] concludes that vouchers would improve both private and public school achievement, findings that reinforce the textbook version of competition. Although Hoxby's formulation is very imaginative, her data set represents an amalgamation of data from many sources, including a very crude estimate of school subsidies as a proxy for vouchers, and she lacks direct measures for many key variables in her model. Her response to the latter challenge is to use an instrumental variable approach, one that has come under strong academic scrutiny recently for results that are nonrobust [Bound, Jaeger, and Baker, 1995; Heckman, 1997].[1] In this context, Kane [1996] has demonstrated that Hoxby's model is based upon a range of arbitrary assumptions that lead to her findings and interpretation. He finds that equally plausible assumptions in model construction and interpretation may yield quite different results.

The Milwaukee Experiment

Of course, none of the public-private comparisons can be as instructive as the direct evaluation of a voucher intervention. There are a handful of voucher-type mechanisms funded by private sources, but none has been subjected to a careful evaluation of achievement effects [Moe, 1995a]. The only attempt to assess directly the impact of vouchers on student achievement has been the Milwaukee Voucher experiment. That experiment allowed students from families with incomes no more than 1.75 times the poverty line to attend private nonsectarian schools in Milwaukee with public funds. The numbers of participants were limited to no more than 1 percent of Milwaukee Public School enrollments except for the fifth year of the program when the limit was raised to 1.5 percent. Some seven schools participated initially, rising to 12 in the last two years. September enrollments in the private school program rose from 341 in 1990–1991 to 830 in the 1994–1995 school year, considerably below the maximum number eligible to participate, which varied from 931 in the first year of the program to 1450 in the fifth year. Attrition rates from year-to-year were considerable, varying from 46 percent in the first year to 28 percent in the fifth year, so relatively few students participated for three years or more [Witte, Sterr, and Thorn, 1995, Table 1].

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[1] The technique of instrumental variables is often used to control for selection bias, such as the likelihood that families that send their children to private schools may be very different from those that send their children to public schools, or the likelihood that private schools may also select among student applicants. These selection effects can determine educational outcomes, even in the absence of differential school effects, but they will be interpreted as school effects unless properly accounted for. Instrumental variables are used to serve as surrogates for the unobservable factors that may determine selection. A good instrumental variable should be highly correlated with the unobservable variables determining selection to each school sector, but he uncorrelated with the error term. In his critique of instrumental variables, Heckman [1997] concludes that "statistical assumptions made in evaluation research are based on strong behavioral assumptions even though they are often disguised" (p. 640). In the present case, the instruments that are chosen are assumed to be highly correlated with the unobserved selection variables, but this is often impossible to verify. Thus, plausibility of the particular instruments that are chosen by the authors becomes the major criterion for their use, with little or no formal analysis of their properties or biases. See also Bound, Jaeger, and Baker [1995], J. Levin [1997], and Ludwig and Bassi [1997] for discussions of these issues and the problem of lack of robustness when using instrumental variables.

Although much has been made of the Milwaukee experiment by both advocates and detractors of vouchers, its potential for providing evidence is far more limited than its use by policy analysts. Among the limitations in drawing conclusions from results based upon this experiment are the high attrition rates of students, the fact that relatively few schools participated, and the very substantial problems of missing data on test scores and student background variables.[2] Even Rouse [1997a], the most sophisticated analyses of these data, is riddled with cautions about data gaps and the assumptions that are made to address them including the use of instrumental variables.

Witte, Sterr, and Thorn [1995] compared student achievement over five years and found no systematic differences between voucher students in private schools and statistically similar students in the Milwaukee Public Schools. Their findings were challenged by Greene, Peterson, and Du [1996]. These authors argued that because oversubscribed schools had to randomly choose students from their applicant pool, these conditions "allowed for a natural randomized experiment" (p. 4). They then compared students who had been chosen to participate with those in the applicant pool who had not been chosen. In short, they found that private school voucher students in their first two years had achievement levels that were not different from nonaccepted applicants who were in the Milwaukee Public Schools. However, they found that voucher students in the third and fourth years of participation scored higher than the general pool of nonselected students. They concluded that "students benefit in measurable ways from the choice experience only after participating in the program for three or more years" (p. 13).

Although it can be argued that the students who *entered* the voucher schools were equivalent for comparative purposes to the nonselected students, it cannot be argued that third and fourth year students were equivalent to the control group of nonselected students. In fact, attrition rates were approximately 30 percent *annually*. Attrition students had lower test scores than those who continued to participate in the voucher schools [Witte et al., 1994, p. 23, Table 1.8]. This result is consistent with the general literature on school mobility, in that students who persisted in the same school were superior to those who moved back to the Milwaukee Public Schools. The Greene, Peterson, and Du [1996] analysis, then, compares the stable group who persisted for three or four years in the same school (superior in achievement to those who did not persist) with all nonselected students. The persistent voucher students were a superior subset, not a random subset, of the original applicant pool. Therefore, it is invalid to compare them with the original nonchosen group and to conclude that the higher achievement scores of voucher students in their third and fourth year were due to a schooling effect.

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[2] For example, Rouse [1997a] found that about 40 to 60 percent of the students' records were missing family income data and prior test scores, even though these are crucial control variables.

As previously mentioned, the Rouse study is the most complete in terms of its treatment of the Milwaukee data. Although Rouse uses the instrumental variable technique, she checks for robustness of results under many different assumptions about sampling, specification, and missing data.[3] Rouse found a modest advantage of the private schools with respect to mathematics achievement, a differential gain of about 1.5 percentile points a year over public schools. She found no difference in reading achievement.

I am persuaded by Rouse's careful analysis, based upon testing alternative assumptions and addressing potential biases in the data, that her findings are probably the most reasonable conclusions for the Milwaukee data. Even so, she cautions against generalizing to other cities for other populations and reminds us that the comparisons that she makes are only among students from the relatively small fraction of poor families that exercised the option of applying to attend a private school. That is, the achievement differences that are estimated are based upon comparing private school applicants (probably from families with high educational motivation) who were accepted and those who were not rather than among the preponderance of students whose families did not attempt to take advantage of the voucher option.

Differences on Other Outcomes

My own reading of the body of studies comparing student achievement in public and private schools is that differences are small. Along other dimensions there may be a larger private school advantage for some groups. Sander [1996] found no difference in achievement between public and private schools for Hispanics and African Americans with statistical controls for family background when using the High School and Beyond data set. When Neal [1997] combined data from the 1980 census, the National Catholic Education Association, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), he found that urban minority students attending Catholic secondary schools had considerably higher graduation rates than comparable public school students as well as higher college graduation rates. He attributes these results to the particularly poor public schools that are available to this group of students. It should be noted that Bryk, Lee, and Holland [1993] found that students in Catholic high schools are more likely to be assigned to an academic track, to have more homework, and to benefit from more effective educational practices generally than students in public high schools. Neal [1997] estimates that the greater educational attainments of Catholic school minority students in urban settings lead to earnings that are 8 percent higher than for comparable students in urban public schools. Evans and Schwab [1995] also found greater high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates for Catholic school students. Finally, as expected, parental satisfaction with the schools their students are attending seems to be consistently higher for parents of students enrolled in private schools relative to their satisfaction with prior public schools that their offspring attended [Moe, 1995a; Witte, Sterr, and Thorn, 1995].

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[3] This paper is a pleasure to read because of the careful consideration of potential pitfalls and the attempt to evaluate their impact. It will be published in a forthcoming number of the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. A summary has been published in the Canadian journal, *Policy Options* [Rouse, 1997b].

WHO WILL CHOOSE AND WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES?

Advocates for vouchers believe that the advent of marketplace choice in education will level the playing field by providing options in education for those who are most disadvantaged by the present educational system. According to this view, children from middle and higher socioeconomic families can choose to live in the best neighborhoods with good schools or to attend private schools. In contrast, children from poorer families are captives in neighborhood schools in inner cities or rural areas without the ability to pursue alternatives. If alternatives are provided, large numbers will use their vouchers to choose better schools, requiring neighborhood schools to improve or putting them out of business if they fail to improve. This view is reinforced by the fact that surveys of poor and minority families show that they favor choice even more than other groups [Lee, Croninger, and Smith, 1996]. But such a scenario assumes that the poor will take advantage of a choice system to outflank their local public schools in search of better education for their students.

In this section, I will suggest that the evidence consistently supports the following conclusions: (1) Choosers will be more advantaged both educationally and economically than nonchoosers, those who do not actively choose schools for their students, thereby relegating them to their assigned schools; (2) For choosers, an important criterion will be the socioeconomic status (SES) of other students where the most preferred schools will be those enrolling more advantaged students leading to increased segregation; and (3) Both peer and contextual effects of higher SES students will have positive effects on achievement, leading to the conclusion that inequalities in educational outcomes are likely to be exacerbated by vouchers.

Who Chooses?

Choice systems may lead to two types of "cream skimming." In the first type, families that are better-off may be more likely to take advantage of school choice than those that are worse off because of better access to information, greater ability to afford transportation, a higher penchant to exercise educational alternatives, and greater generic experience with choice and alternatives. A second type of cream skimming refers to the tendency of schools to seek and choose students from families of higher SES and with higher previous educational accomplishments (as modeled by Nechyba [1996] and corroborated empirically in Belgium by Vandenberghe [1996]).

To some degree, the second of these can be reduced through requiring random selection among student applicants, but the first may be endemic to educational choice systems as the empirical literature suggests. In both public choice and voucher-type systems, it appears that those who exercise the choice option are more likely to be of higher SES and to have higher achievement scores than those who continue to attend their assigned schools [Archbald, 1988; Martinez, Godwin, and Kemerer, 1996; Rubenstein, Hamar, and Adelman, 1992; Witte and Thorn, 1996]. Ambler [1994] found such cream skimming in educational choice participation for both England and France. Willms and Echols [1992] found the same to be true in Scotland as did Vandenberghe [1996] in Belgium. Archbald [1988] and Moore and Davenport [1990] found that magnet schools in the large cities that rely on choice to reduce school segregation tend to attract higher socioeconomic students rather than a random mix.[4] Even when participation was restricted to families with incomes no higher than 1.75 times the poverty level, parents of choice applicants in the Milwaukee voucher experiment had considerably more education and parental involvement than the average parent of children in the Milwaukee Public Schools. In a publication on four private voucher plans in the United States, Terry Moe [1995b], one of the most knowledgeable supporters of vouchers, concluded that the problem represents a serious challenge:

> Skimming is rooted in the calculus of choice itself: in the utility functions of parents, the information they bring to bear, and their income constraints. Some parents put a higher value on education than others and so are willing to give up more to secure quality schooling for their children. Some parents have more information than others and thus know more about what schools are available and how good they are. And some parents have higher incomes than others and so are better able to acquire good information and afford good schools. Unrestricted choice, then, may well lead to selection effects with a class bias. (Moe, 1995b, p. 23)

Moe concludes that such skimming can be reduced through restricting choice to those who are most disadvantaged as well as making sure that voucher plans are ". . . socially engineered through appropriate institutional design" [Moe, 1995b, p. 24] to insure greater social equity. Presumably such design features would include more comprehensive and interactive systems of information as well as adequate transportation and a voucher of sufficient size to purchase education of a high quality. However, such social equity features may have a high cost, an issue that is addressed later, and it is not clear that society is willing to pay such costs.

Moe concludes, correctly in my view, that the issue is not whether there is skimming, but whether the skimming will be worse than the present public system where students tend to be largely segregated in schools with students similar to themselves [Moe, 1995b, p. 24]. Moe is also correct in suggesting that by restricting the choice only to those most disadvantaged by the present system, social equity would be likely to improve, although I have doubts that political dynamics would support that solution over the long run. But what is the likely impact of a more extensive system of choice on student segregation?

Impact on Socioeconomic Segregation

Many observers have been concerned about the consequences of educational choice for segregation. It has been argued even that one of the direct purposes of choice is to increase segregation according to religious and cultural differences to create communities of human capital through common "social capital" [Coleman, 1988]. Understandably, private schools tend to specialize in market niches by creating differentiated rather than generic products in order to appeal to clientele with particular political, philosophical, educational, and religious orientations. This has been evident in Holland where publicly funded private schools accounted for almost three-fourths of all enrollments in 1980, and where over 90 percent of these schools were sponsored by religious groups [Ambler, 1994; pp. 468–469]. Surely this leads to greater religious segregation than would be found if schools were based strictly on attendance boundaries.

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[4] Lee [1993] argues that even within schools, the more demanding and rigorous curricula are chosen by students from more advantaged backgrounds.

But to what degree does the fact that choosers tend to be from higher socioeconomic (SES) origins lead to greater SES segregation of students? Since 1982 Scotland has permitted parents to request public schools other than those to which their students are designated by public authorities. By the late 1980s about 9 percent of entering secondary students attended a school outside of their designated areas, with the numbers rising to 11 to 14 percent in urban areas according to sources cited by Willms and Echols [1992, p. 340]. By the early 1990s about 15 to 18 percent of pupils in the most urban areas had requests for other schools made on their behalf, with some areas experiencing requests for more than 50 percent of students [Willms, 1996, p. 140]. Willms and Echols [1992] found that parents requesting nondesignated schools had significantly more education and higher occupations than those who kept their children in designated schools, as much as 0.35 standard deviations higher (p. 344). Average SES of pupils in the chosen schools was about 0.25 standard deviations greater than in designated schools. Thus, choosers tended to have higher SES than nonchoosers and to request schools with higher SES than their designated schools. Willms and Echols [1992] conclude that this is a major criterion of selection because higher SES schools tend to have high achievement scores, although not necessarily high value added, which should be a more central concern. But high SES of the student body of a school is easily observable, whereas direct measures of value-added are not. Overall, the effect of this choice process was to increase the segregation by SES of Scottish students between 1985 and 1991 [Willms, 1996]. In response to Moe's [1995b] question on whether choice increases student SES segregation, the answer in the Scottish case seems to be clearly affirmative. An analysis of Belgium shows even greater student segregation under choice [Vandenberghe, 1996], but this probably includes both aforementioned types of cream-skimming. On a related theme, Lankford and Wyckoff [1997] have analyzed 1990 census data for eight New York metropolitan areas and found that school choice leads to a substantial increase in racial segregation (largely through whites shifting from public schools in cities to private schools or suburban public schools with lower nonwhite concentrations).

Consequences of Increased Segregation

Willms and Echols [1992] proceeded to estimate the effects of schools on student achievement and found that parents tended to choose schools with high achievement scores and student SES, but not schools with high "value-added" results after taking account of student intakes. That is, the superior school "effects" were mainly due to a higher SES student body rather than school effectiveness with a given group of students. In turn, it appears that increased student segregation by SES will promote inequality of opportunity because aggregate SES of the school seems to have an impact on achievement independent of the effect of the student's individual SES on her achievement [Arnott and Rowse, 1987; Evans, Oates, and Schwab, 1992; Henderson, Mieszkowski, and Sauvageau, 1978; Link and Mulligan, 1991; Rumberger and

Willms, 1992; Shavit and Williams, 1985; Summers and Wolfe, 1977; Willms, 1986]. It is not clear whether this effect comes from the influence of peers, school climate, teaching conditions, or differences in teacher expectations and curriculum, a matter of debate within the literature [Dreeben and Gamoran, 1986; Dynarski, Schwab, and Zampelli, 1989; Gamoran, 1991; Rumberger and Willms, 1992]. But it does suggest rising inequalities in achievement between students of lower and higher SES as they become increasingly segregated in schools with students like themselves. As higher SES students leave lower SES school environments for higher SES schools, their achievement will rise; however, their departure reduces the aggregate SES of the schools that they leave with a resulting decline in the achievement of the remaining students in those schools. It is important to keep in mind that this is a zero-sum game because there are only a fixed number of high SES student enrollments at any one time. That is, high SES schools are not reproducible as school environments. Thus, not all potential choice students can be accommodated by a high SES school environment beyond a relatively limited number of schools.

Further, the negative effects on low SES students are likely to be greater than the gains of high SES students. The negative impact of segregation on the achievement of students in low tracks (largely low SES) is not offset by the higher achievement of students in high tracks (largely high SES) according to statistical analysis by Gamoran and Nystrand [1994]. This is also the conclusion of Henderson, Mieskowski, and Sauvageau [1978] whose results suggest that overall achievement is higher in heterogeneous rather than segregated school environments because any loss of achievement by the higher groups is more than made up by the higher achievement of the lower groups. Summers and Wolfe [1977] also found that less able students benefit more from this effect, while higher ability students are less affected. Thus, if choice leads to greater SES segregation, the impact on achievement will be to reduce aggregate student achievement unless gains through school competition offset the achievement losses due to increased student segregation by SES. However, existing empirical findings comparing public and private school achievement are not promising in this regard.

Increased segregation has other consequences as well, particularly on the preparation of students for democratic life. Effective participation in a democracy requires a willingness to tolerate diversity as well as an acceptance of a common set of values and a shared base of knowledge. Research on political socialization has shown that tolerance for other points of view is related to the degree to which different children are exposed to diverse viewpoints on controversial subjects in both home and school [Torney-Purta, 1984]. It also requires a common core of experiences to create citizens who can function democratically [Gutmann, 1987, pp. 50–64]. But by segregating students to a greater extent than existing schools according to SES, religion, race, and other dimensions, the exposure to diversity and to a common core of experiences is seriously undermined [Cookson, 1994].

COSTS OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND A VOUCHER SYSTEM

Of course, to economists and society it is not only the educational effects of vouchers that should be considered, but also their costs. There are two levels of costs in assessing the voucher alternative. First, there is the cost at the school level. That is, for a given result in school effectiveness, what are the relative costs of public versus private schools? Second, there is the cost of the overall infrastructure to support a voucher marketplace relative to the present system which is considerably more centralized at both state and district levels. In this section, we will consider what is known about each.

Costs of Private Versus Public Schools

Even if private and public schools are about equally effective in producing student achievement, observers have suggested that nonelite private schools incur considerably lower costs than public schools. For example, Peterson and Noyes [1996] claim that Milwaukee voucher schools were receiving only half as much for each student as the Milwaukee Public Schools. Therefore, they assert that even if the voucher schools are no more effective than the Milwaukee Public Schools, they are twice as efficient in the use of society's scarce resources. A publication of the Cato Institute, a libertarian organization, makes the same point by comparing the tuition at private schools in several localities with total per-pupil expenditure in the public school system in those areas [Boaz and Barrett, 1996]. This conclusion is also stated in other pro-market publications [see, for example, American Enterprise Institute, 1978; West, 1981].

But a comparison of public school expenditures with private school tuition is not a valid approach to comparing costs. The problem is that the finance and service mix of public and private schools is quite different. For example, tuition is a much poorer proxy for the overall costs of private schools than is per-pupil expenditure as a measure of public school costs. Most private schools rely heavily on supplementing tuition with fund-raising events, special student fees for extra activities, financial contributions, and in-kind contributions. In addition, those that are sponsored by religious organizations (the majority of private schools) receive donated or subsidized facilities and are staffed partially by teaching clergy whose "salaries" understate substantially their true market value [Bartell, 1968]. The result is that tuition charges cover only a portion of the overall costs of private education. Although the public sector costs are not a complete measure of the costs of public education, especially because of their treatment of capital expenses, they are far more complete in comprising all of their resource inputs at market prices than is the tuition measure for private schools.

Beyond this, however, the service mix is very different between public and private schools. For example, few private schools provide special educational services for students with disabilities, while public schools are required to do so by law. Average costs of education for each special education student have been estimated to be almost 2.5 times the average cost for the nonhandicapped student [Chaikind, Danielson, and Brauen, 1993]. In New York City it was estimated that the cost was four times that of typical students in 1993 [Lankford and Wyckoff, 1996, p. 231]. Moreover, special education students represent about 12 percent of all students nationally, but are concentrated almost completely in public schools (with the exception of those in very high-cost, specialized private schools mainly subsidized by government).

Further, the comparison of average per-pupil expenditures for public schools includes other services not provided by most private schools. For example, most private secondary schools do not provide vocational education, a course of study that varies from two to more than five times the cost of regular education, depending upon the specialization [Hu and Stromsdorfer, 1979]. Transportation and food services are included in the total for public school expenditures, but private schools normally charge extra fees for these benefits. Finally, the tuition charges that are usually compared with public school expenditures are those for elementary schools (typically parochial, Catholic schools), while the public school figures comprise both elementary schools and the more costly secondary schools.

To test the assertion that the Milwaukee voucher schools had a per-pupil cost that was half that of comparable public schools, I contacted the Milwaukee Public Schools to obtain per-pupil expenditure breakdowns [Haselow, 1996]. Voucher schools were receiving $4373 per student in 1996–1997. The Milwaukee Public Schools had an estimated budget for the same year of $7628 per student, but this amount included many services not required or provided by the voucher schools. For example, the voucher students were enrolled in kindergarten to eighth grade schools, while the Milwaukee Public Schools total included the more expensive high school students as well. Voucher schools did not enroll expensive special education students and did not provide transportation or the extensive food and health services provided by the Milwaukee Public Schools.

A more appropriate comparison is to compare site-based expenditures in Milwaukee Public Schools with the voucher schools. Milwaukee provides such school-based allocations according to predetermined personnel ratios and other factors. (Secondary schools and middle schools have the largest allocation per student, about $3815 for each middle school student and $3635 for each high school student.) The Milwaukee Public Schools budgeted $3469 per student in K–8 schools and $3042 per student in K–6 elementary schools. If we compare the voucher with the per-pupil amount for K–8 schools, the voucher schools received about $1000 *more* per student than the comparable Milwaukee Public Schools for the 1996–1997 school year. On the basis of costing experience for public schools, it is estimated that facilities costs on an annualized basis are about 10 percent of total expenditures in what is a labor-intensive enterprise, closing about half of the gap, but still favoring the voucher schools. The most reasonable conclusion is that voucher schools in Milwaukee are receiving *at least* comparable allocations per student to those of the Milwaukee Public Schools, once the service mix is accounted for.

Of course, this raises the question of what accounts for the other costs of the school district that are not allocated specifically to the individual school sites. The costs of special education services are budgeted at the central level; with over 12 percent of the students in these categories and excess costs averaging about 150 percent more than regular education, this accounts for about $1100 per student in central office expenditures when averaged across all students in the district. Transportation costs, including those for carrying students to voucher schools, run about $565 averaged across all the students of the district, and much more per transported student. In addition, there are the higher costs of secondary schools, food services, health services, and capital costs. Overall costs of central office administration are only about 3 percent of per-student expenditures. Although this does not constitute a precise cost-accounting for the two sets of schools, it appears that the costs of similar services at the school site may favor slightly the Milwaukee voucher schools. Claims that the public schools cost twice as much as comparable private schools in other settings should also be subjected to careful scrutiny. My guess is that such cost comparisons would show that even in the least efficient school districts, costs for similar services in public schools are far from the two-fold figure that is commonly cited by market advocates.

Cost of a Voucher System

A shift from the prevalent system of state finance and governance of education to one based upon educational vouchers will require a profound transformation of the institutions required to support the schooling system. In particular, it will require far more transaction costs because states must deal with individual schools and students rather than districts. For example, in California a system of vouchers would require state authorities to keep records and administer vouchers to almost 6 million youngsters in place of dealing with about 1000 local school districts. In order to assure adequate access to alternatives, it is probable that information centers would need to be established to enable parents to make informed choices, and an expanded system of publicly funded transportation would need to be incorporated. In addition, some type of system of adjudication would need to be provided for parents who wanted a partial refund of vouchers in order to change schools during the academic year. Finally, a state system of monitoring and assessment would be needed to establish voucher eligibility of both students and schools.

The estimation of the costs of a voucher system to replace existing systems of schooling cannot be done without specification of the particular voucher plan that is being considered; the system that it will replace; the setting where it will be applied; and assumptions about the behavior of schools and families under the voucher approach. Cyrus Driver and I [Levin and Driver, 1996; Levin and Driver, 1997] have attempted to estimate illustrative costs in five areas associated with a voucher system. These include: (1) accommodating additional students; (2) record keeping and monitoring; (3) transportation; (4)information; and (5) adjudication of disputes. Only a summary of results will be shown here, so the two source documents should be reviewed for the details underlying the calculations. Cost estimates are generally for 1992–1993 (expressed in 1995 dollars) with a few exceptions.

Accommodating Additional Students

If all private school students were to participate with the full range of services provided by the public schools at the average per-pupil expenditure nationally, the added cost would be about $33 billion annually. If only 75 percent were eligible because some schools would not wish to participate in a plan with government oversight, the cost would be almost $25 billion annually. Or, if the voucher were set at 80 percent of public school costs these amounts would be about $26 billion and $20 billion, respectively.

Record Keeping and Monitoring

A voucher system will require extensive record keeping and monitoring systems for several reasons. First, every child required to be in school under compulsory attendance laws and those continuing their education through high school graduation will need to be monitored to ensure that they are in a school approved to use the voucher. Second, children with different educational needs (for example, students at each level of schooling, students with disabilities) will be eligible for different vouchers. Students will need to be evaluated in terms of needed services and the appropriate magnitude of the voucher. Third, only schools that meet "approval" standards will redeem vouchers, so schools must be evaluated, certified, and monitored for eligibility. (In 1995–1996 two of the Milwaukee voucher schools closed in midyear, stranding the students and relegating their involuntary return to the Milwaukee Public Schools. At the time of the writing of this article, criminal charges were pending because of alleged financial manipulations by the schools' operators.) The costs of monitoring and accreditation would be likely to be particularly high because we would expect about twice as many schools under a voucher plan, given that private schools tend to be about half the average size of existing public schools [Chambers, 1981]. Using the social security system as an analogy, it was estimated that even with cost savings from dismantling the present system, there would be a net additional cost for record keeping and monitoring of about \$2.5 billion nationally. This figure does not include the costs of accrediting and monitoring the approximately 200,000 schools we would expect under a market approach, a serious omission and understatement of costs, because of a lack of an analogous database that might be used.

Transportation

Transportation costs would be expected to be higher under a voucher system than the present system for two reasons. First, the advent of choice should lead to more students attending schools outside of their immediate neighborhoods. Second, the routes are likely to be of lower density and regularity in terms of pickups and deliveries. About 60 percent of U.S. public school students are bused at present, and we assumed that this would rise to about 80 percent of public and private school students. After scrutinizing a large number of travel modes and examining existing costs for school transportation, we estimated that additional transportation costs would be about \$42 billion based upon an additional 13.3 million students being bused and a rise in costs from about \$415 per student in 1992–1993 to about \$1500 per student for that school year had a voucher plan been in effect. It should be noted that busing costs for desegregation purposes in the St. Louis area are at a level of about \$2000 per student per year, a level that was also reported by Milwaukee for its interdistrict busing program [Haselow, 1996]. In addition, the use of smaller buses and larger catchment areas is even more costly as evidenced by both commercial cost estimates and the experiences in transporting children who need special education.

Information Costs

In order to make informed choices, parents need information on alternatives. At a minimum, families need to know what choices are available and the appropriateness of particular choices for their children. They also need information on such matters as school philosophy, curriculum, personnel, facilities, test scores, student placements after graduation, registered complaints and their nature, and turnover rates among students. Using a very modest approach such as one used for a choice program in Massachusetts, we estimated the per-pupil cost at about \$38 per year or about \$1.8 billion nationally. It should be noted that this probably understates seriously the cost for a highly effective information system that would engage the poor, minorities, and immigrants, groups that have been least likely to participate in choice systems. We, however, do not have a knowledge base for estimating the cost of a more ambitious system.

Costs of Adjudication

Some families will choose schools that they later find are inappropriate for their students. Schools may also wish to suspend or discharge students who do not meet certain standards. In cases like these there may be issues of due process as well as the right of a student to obtain an additional partial-voucher to use for another school if the original one has been redeemed. There may also be challenges to the voucher agency, including conflicts about whether a student is getting an appropriate voucher for the educational services that the family believes are required. In all of these cases a means of adjudication must be available to quickly resolve the dilemma so that a child's education is not seriously interrupted. Using cost data from mediation and due process hearings for special education and assuming that only 1 percent of students will require adjudication in any given year, we estimate the costs of adjudication at about $1.8 billion.

Total Costs of a Voucher System

These are first estimates of the costs of a voucher system, and they total almost $73 billion, about $1500 per student or an additional 25 percent of the public educational budget nationally. The net costs of record keeping and monitoring may be slightly overstated if we have not fully accounted for the savings from existing practices, but this category of costs accounted for less than 4 percent of the total. Information costs are surely too low, and we have not included, at all, the costs of accrediting and monitoring schools to be eligible to redeem vouchers. We conclude that the shift from the existing system to a voucher system with a well-functioning school marketplace in which adequate transportation and information is provided will demand considerable additional resources for education beyond those allocated for educational vouchers and instructional services.[5]

POSTCRIPT

During the last five years we have come a long way in acquiring evidence that is pertinent to the consideration of educational vouchers, although there are still many gaps in our knowledge base. Unfortunately, policy debates on vouchers are largely devoid of references to the available evidence or are limited to citing only a "favored" study that supports a particular perspective. I have suggested here that there is a considerable consensus arising from the available corpus of evidence on the first two issues set out in this article, and at least a first approximation on the cost issues. I want to conclude by stating that nothing in this article should give much comfort to those who might wish to defend the status quo. In my view, considerable gains in educational efficiency are possible, whether vouchers or some other type of system reform are the answer. Evidence of this claim can be found in a school reform movement that has extended to about 1000 public, Catholic, and charter schools in some 40 states, where we have demonstrated that substantial improvements in educational results can be obtained at low cost [H. Levin, 1997].

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[5] A reviewer suggested that this cost of infrastructure may be, at least, partially offset by a higher level of efficiency at the school site. For example, if the competitive pressures of the marketplace raised efficiency by 10 percent, that would be equivalent to a savings of about $600 per student or 40 percent of the higher estimated cost of the overall voucher system. This is certainly possible theoretically. It is important to note, however, that none of the present evidence on achievement differences would suggest even a 10 percent efficiency advantage.

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HENRY M. LEVIN is the David Jacks Professor of Higher Education and Economics at Stanford University.

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The Milwaukee Voucher Experiment

John F. Witte
University of Wisconsin-Madison

This article provides a summary of the results of the first five years of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, which was the first program in the United States to allow students to attend private schools with public vouchers. I begin with a brief discussion of the theoretical and research issues. Following a description of the initial program and subsequent changes, I outline who participated in the program—including characteristics of students and families and schools. I then describe the results in terms of the effects on families, student outcomes, and schools. I conclude with a discussion of the implications for this type of program and more open-ended voucher programs. For those holding extreme positions on this controversial issue, there will be both ammunition and frustration, for the results contain both positive and negative elements. The quality of both the public and private schools and therefore student outcomes vary within and between schools, and that variance is more extreme than in middle-class or wealthy communities. Some schools are excellent, and families fight to get in them and stay in them. Some are so bad that they fail and, if they are private, cease to exist—often in mid-year. The general results of the voucher program follow that pattern: Some results are clearly positive, some can be interpreted either way, and others are negative.

The Milwaukee voucher program was enacted by the Wisconsin State Legislature in the summer of 1990. Beginning that August, it allowed students to attend private schools with public vouchers for the first time in the United States. This article provides a summary of the results of the first five years of that program. I begin with a brief discussion of the theoretical and research issues—brief because these issues have been thoroughly aired many times (Cookson, 1994; Henig, 1994; Smith & Meier, 1995; Wells, 1993; Witte & Rigdon, 1993). Following a description of the initial program and subsequent changes, I outline who participated in the program—including characteristics of students and families and schools. I then describe the results in terms of the effects on families and students and on schools. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this type of program and more open-ended voucher programs.

For those holding extreme positions on this controversial issue, there will be both ammunition and frustration, for the results contain both positive and negative elements. The mostly quantitative results presented conform to perceptions revealed by five years of observation and case studies of the private schools, as well as analysis of the Milwaukee Public Schools over the last decade. The quality of both the public and private schools, and student outcomes, varies within and among schools, and that variance is more extreme than in middle-class or wealthy communities. Some schools are excellent, and families fight to get in them and stay in them. Some are so bad that they fail and, if they are private, cease to exist—often in mid-year. The general results of the voucher program follow that pattern: Some results are clearly positive, some can be interpreted either way, and others are negative.

Theoretical and Research Issues

At an abstract level, educational vouchers represent an approach to the provision of a collective good that challenges the dominant public goods approach to American education. The market model on which vouchers are based assumes a set of private choices by families and providers, which in the extreme would be unfettered by government interference or regulation. As such, it deviates considerably from the public provision of education—controlled democratically and heavily regulated by local, state, and federal rules, statutes, and constitutional provisions. It also assumes a very different approach to accountability, with public schools held accountable through external promulgation and review of results, while the market model bases accountability on consumer (family) satisfaction. Arguments for and against these models have been discussed at length in a literature that need not be reiterated here (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Cookson, 1994; Coons & Sugarman, 1978, 1992; Friedman, 1955; Hannaway & Garner, 1980; Henig, 1994; Hoffer, Kilgore, & Coleman, 1982; Manski, 1992; Smith & Meier, 1995; Wells, 1993; Witte, 1992; Witte & Rigdon, 1993).

The general issues associated with the public or private provision of collective goods apply directly to educational vouchers. The first, often stressed by philosophers and political theorists more than economists, has to do with the intrinsic value of individual choice. Certainly one could argue quite forcefully, given the world events of the last decade, that individual choice is intrinsically valuable in terms of personal satisfaction, motivation, responsibility, et cetera. Supporters of vouchers, especially those advocating income-targeted vouchers, make a strong claim that vouchers will provide opportunities for a set of families who now are limited to public school options.

On the other hand, the debate over the public or private provision of collective goods invokes concerns and questions over the equity of both opportunities and results. Those favoring private provision emphasize the equal opportunity that vouchers might provide. Opponents stress that vouchers might exacerbate already unequal opportunities and further erode differences between relevant social and racial groups in terms of educational results.

A third consideration is the overall efficiency of public-versus-private approaches to collective goods. Which schools produce the best results at the lowest cost? Will vouchers improve or decrease cost effectiveness? More specifically, will vouchers drive costs toward the currently lower cost of private schools, or will vouchers allow private schools to raise prices to more closely match expenditures by public schools?

The way an individual assesses the trade-off between the values of choice, equity, and efficiency often determines his or her position on educational vouchers. One might concede that vouchers add to family opportunities but still fear the effects on equity would be too great. A fiscal conservative might understandably applaud the increased choice, downplay the equity concerns, but fear that vouchers will simply inject more public money into a system that already spends too much. Thus, honorable people can easily disagree on the normative merits of vouchers.

Because of program constraints, the Milwaukee voucher experiment provides modest evidence on this general set of issues. However, those issues do provide the framework for a series of research questions, which have driven this study over the last five years. First, can a program be developed that will provide increasing opportunities for poor students who currently cannot avail themselves of "better" options in terms of either public or private schools? Or will such a program inevitably "cream off" the best students and families? Second, will a voucher system improve the educational environment for families and students? Are families more satisfied with the education their children are receiving? Is there evidence of improvement in educational achievement and other outcomes? Third, does a voucher system improve the provision of services? Do schools get better? Do more schools, of higher quality, emerge? Is there a reduction in costs for the same quality of service? The Milwaukee voucher program provides some information on all of these questions. However, because of the constraints involved in the program and in the research situation that emerged, generalizations should be considered with caution.

Because Milwaukee's is the first voucher program in the United States to incorporate private schools, there is no directly relevant prior empirical literature to guide this study.[1] However, there have been numerous studies of achievement and other comparisons between public and private schools that have been summarized numerous times (Henig, 1994; Witte, 1992, 1996). The results remain controversial, with some studies arguing for a private school advantage (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1994; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hoffer & Coleman, 1987; Hoffer, Kilgore, & Coleman, 1982; Hoxby, 1996), while others have either found public school advantages or no differences (Driscoll, 1993; Gamoran, 1996; Goldhaber, 1996; Plank et al., 1993). Throughout these studies, the issue of unmeasured selection bias looms as a problem, and the potential methodological solutions are also often challenged. This problem will be discussed below.

What is consistent in these studies is that those who currently attend private schools are much more likely to be White and upper middle class than those attending public schools. Also, religious schools dominate the private sector, with well over 80% of the students attending religiously affiliated schools. As I will note in the conclusion, these facts are not irrelevant in long-term discussions of educational vouchers.

The Milwaukee Voucher Program[2]

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (its statutory title) can be categorized as a limited and targeted voucher program. In contrast with more or less open-ended voucher proposals, such as those proposed and defeated in referendums in Colorado and California, the Milwaukee program was initially designed to create an experimental program to provide an opportunity for some poor children to attend private schools. The program was enacted at the initiative of Republican Governor Tommy Thompson and Democratic Assemblywoman Annette (Polly) Williams. There are a number of detailed specifications that are relevant for understanding what happened in the program.

The Initial Program

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program allows students living in Milwaukee and meeting specific criteria to attend private, *nonsectarian* schools located in the city. For each Choice student, in lieu of tuition and fees, schools receive a payment from public funds equivalent to the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) per-member state aid ($2,500 in 1990–91; $4,373 in 1996–97). Students must come from families with incomes not exceeding 1.75 times the national poverty line. New Choice students initially could not have been in private schools in the prior year or in public schools in districts other than MPS. The total number of Choice students in any year was limited to 1% of the MPS membership in the first four years, but was increased to 1.5% beginning with the 1994–95 school year.

Schools initially had to limit Choice students to 49% of their total enrollment. The legislature increased that to 65% beginning in 1994–95. Schools must admit Choice students without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or prior school performance (as specified in Section 118.13, Wisconsin Statutes). Both the statute and administrative rules specify that pupils must be "accepted on a random basis." This has been interpreted to mean that if a school were oversubscribed in a grade, random selection is required in that grade. However, a 1990 court ruling exempted the private schools from having to enroll all types of disabled students. In addition, in situations in which one child from a family attended the school, a sibling was exempt from random selection even if random selection was required in the child's grade.

The New Program

The legislation was amended as part of the biennial state budget in June 1995. The changes were dramatic. The principal changes were (a) to allow religious schools to enter the program; (b) to allow students in grades kindergarten through grade three, who were already attending private schools, to be eligible for the program;[3] (c) to increase the number of students allowed in the program over three years to a maximum of 15,000 students (from approximately 1,500 allowed prior to 1995); (d) to allow 100% of students in a school to be Choice students; and (e) to eliminate all data collection and evaluations, specifying instead that the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau file a report in the year 2000. Because of court challenges to the new program, parochial schools were not allowed in the program until the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled 4–2 in favor of the new, expanded program in June 1998. Voucher-receiving students attended parochial and nonsectarian private schools for the first time in the fall of 1998.

The evidence reported in this article is based on the initial program, with modifications in 1993. Thus, this policy experiment is far from a test of a universal voucher program. And neither the positive nor negative findings should be generalized to programs without income limits on families and to wider sets of schools that may also be unconstrained in their ability to select students.

Research and Data

The study on which this report is based employs a number of methodological approaches. Surveys were mailed in the fall of each year from 1990 to 1994 to all parents who applied for enrollment in one of the Choice schools. Similar surveys were sent in May and June of 1991 to a random sample of 5,474 parents of students in the Milwaukee Public Schools. Among other purposes, the surveys were intended to assess parent knowledge of and evaluation of the Choice program, educational experiences in prior public schools, the extent of parental involvement in prior MPS schools, and the importance of education and the expectations parents hold for their children. We also obtained demographic information on family members. A follow-up survey of Choice parents assessing attitudes relating to their year in private schools was mailed in June of each year.[4] Finally, beginning in the fall of 1992 and continuing through 1995, brief mail and/or phone surveys were completed with the parents of students who did not continue in the program.

In addition, detailed case studies were completed in April 1991 in the four private schools that enrolled the majority of the Choice students. An additional study was completed in 1992, and six more case studies in the spring of 1993. Case studies of the K–8 schools involved approximately 30 person-days in the schools, including 56 hours of classroom observation and interviews with nearly all of the teachers and administrators in the schools. Smaller schools required less time. Researchers also attended and observed parent and community group meetings and board of director meetings for several schools.

The research includes analysis of four or five years of outcome measures including data on achievement test scores,[5] parental attitudes, parental involvement, attrition from the program, and the effects of the program on private schools. In accordance with normal research protocol, and with the agreement of the private schools, to maintain student confidentiality, reported results are aggregated, and schools are not individually identified.

For economy, and because five years of data provide a better picture than a single year, most tables contain combined data from 1990 to 1994. The most appropriate comparison group to the Choice families, on most measures, is the low-income MPS sample. That group, which includes about two thirds of Milwaukee students, is defined as qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. The income level for reduced-priced lunches is 1.85 times the poverty line; free lunch is 1.35 times the poverty line. Almost all low-income students qualify for full free lunches and thus would have qualified for the Choice program. The full MPS sample is included because one might wish to anticipate expansion of the Choice program to the full population of MPS students. If that were to occur, comparison and generalization of results to the complete random sample would be appropriate.

Some tables include data on "nonselected" Choice applicants, but the outcome results do not. These are students who were randomly rejected from the program. Initially, this group was of great interest because it provided a potential control on unmeasured selection bias. Unmeasured selection bias assumes that there are unmeasured factors that distinguish "choosing" families from "nonchoosers" and which affect student achievement. Randomly rejected students should theoretically possess these unmeasured characteristics to the same degree as those selected into the program, thus providing the opportunity to analyze a natural experiment in student achievement. Unfortunately, as will be discussed below, it is my opinion that for reasons beyond the control of the program or the research, this sample of students is completely unreliable as a control on selection bias. A more detailed paper on this subject has been presented earlier and is forthcoming in a book on vouchers in America (Witte, 1997, in press). Others hold a contradictory opinion (Green, Peterson, & Du, 1996; Rouse, 1997).

Findings

Enrollment in Choice

Because most people assume that private schools provide superior education to public schools, it is usually assumed that demand for vouchers would exceed supply and that the issue would be the generation of new schools. However, evidence from the Milwaukee Choice Program indicates that this assumption is too simplistic. The program has not included religious private schools, which have always been the mainstay of private education in the United States. Without religiously affiliated schools being eligible for vouchers, there appear to be both supply and demand problems.

Supply and demand in the Choice Program. Enrollment statistics for the Choice Program are provided in Table 1. Enrollment in the program increased steadily but slowly, never reaching the maximum number of students allowed by the law. September enrollments were 341, 521, 620, 742, and 830 from 1990–91 to 1994–95. The number of schools participating was:7 in 1990–91, 6 in 1991–92, 11 in 1992–93, and 12 from fall 1993 to 1995. The number of applications also increased, with again the largest increase in 1992–93. In the last two years, however, applications leveled off at a

TABLE 1

Participation and Attrition From the Choice Program, 1990–1995

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Number of students allowed in the Choice Program (limited to 1% of MPS enrollment)/1.5% 1994–95	931	946	950	968	1,450
Number of private nonsectarian schools in Milwaukee	22	22	23	23	23
Number of schools participating	7	6	11	12	12
Number of applications	577	689	998	1,049	1,046
Number of available seats	406	546	691	811	982
Number of students participating					
September count	341	521	620	742	830
January count	259	526	586	701	—
June count	249	477	570	671	—
Graduating students	8	28	32	42	45
Number of returning Choice students	NA	178	323	405	491
Attrition rate[a]	0.46	0.35	0.31	0.27	0.28
Attrition rate without alternative schools	0.44[b]	0.32	0.28	0.23	0.24

[a] The attrition rate for year t is defined as 1.0 – [the number of returning students in year $t + 1$/(the September count in year t – graduating students in year t)].

[b] If Juanita Virgil Academy is excluded, the attrition rate is 0.29.

little over 1,000 per year. Applications exceeded the number of available seats (as determined by the private schools) by 171, 143, 307, 238, and 64 from 1990–91 through 1994–95. Some of these students eventually filled seats of students who were accepted but did not actually enroll.

The number of potential schools in the program was an obvious limitation. Only 22–23 secular private schools existed in Milwaukee during this period. That compared to close to 100 religious private schools. Of the secular schools, more than half chose not to participate in the Choice Program. We contacted those schools in the third year of the program. The reason for nonparticipation varied. Several schools concluded it was too costly for the school (the voucher would not match tuition); others were devoted "contract" schools with MPS;[4] others were wary that this program was established by African Americans—primarily for African Americans.

However, the limited supply was not much of a constraining factor because applications were far from the avalanche that Choice supporters often tout. The number of seats available consistently exceeded the number of students enrolled, but primarily because not enough seats were available in the most desirable schools. It is difficult to determine how many more applications would have been made if more schools participated and more seats were available. In 1992–93, when the number of participating schools increased from 6 to 11, applications rose by 45%. From fall 1993 to 1995, however, seats available increased by 22% and 21%, but applications increased by only 5% in 1993–94 and declined in the last year.

During the Choice experiment, there was a parallel privately funded "scholarship" program that clearly affected the demand for vouchers—and possibly the supply of schools as well. This program, Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE), provided half of the tuition (up to $1,000) for free-lunch-eligible students and allowed them to attend any private school. Nearly all of the PAVE scholarship students attended parochial schools. The draw of religious schools was clear in that almost three times the number of students applied for PAVE scholarships as applied for vouchers, yet families were required to come up with half of the tuition for PAVE schools (Beales & Wahl, 1995; Wahl, 1994). Because many parochial schools had vacancies, the program also probably deterred new private schools from opening.

Who applied for vouchers? Vouchers raise concerns about both equal opportunity and equality of results. The opportunity concerns surrounding voucher programs can be broken down into two separate issues: (a) Without any program limits or eligibility requirements, who would use vouchers to attend private schools? And (b) can a targeted voucher program be created that will increase opportunities for students currently unable to attend private schools? The Milwaukee voucher program provides little evidence on the former question, but considerable evidence on the latter. However, given the political inclination to move this program from a targeted to an open-ended voucher program, the former issue is of ultimate importance and will be addressed in the conclusion of the article.

Based on survey responses sent to parents of Choice applicants, the picture of parents applying to the targeted Milwaukee Program is very clear. Five years of survey data, for five separate family cohorts, are extremely consistent. Table 2 provides a very interesting demographic picture of applicants, and Table 3 provides evidence of prior behavior and attitudes toward prior schools.

The demographic profile was quite consistent over each of the five years. Both applicants, and students who ultimately enrolled in Choice, were from very-low-income families, considerably below the average MPS family and about $500 per year below the low-income (free-lunch-eligible) MPS family. Blacks and Hispanics were the primary applicants to the program, both being overrepresented compared with the MPS control groups. Asian students essentially did not apply, and White students were considerably underrepresented. Also, Choice students were considerably less likely to come from a household in which parents were married (25%) than their counterparts in MPS (35% for low-income and 51% for all MPS families).

In contrast, however, Choice mothers reported considerably more education than did mothers in MPS. Fifty-two percent of applicant parents and 55% of enrollees reported some college. This contrasted with 30% and 40% for the two MPS samples. Finally, there is also evidence that Choice families were small, averaging about 2.5 children

TABLE 2
Demographic Characteristics of Experimental Groups

	1 Choice applied 1990–94	2 Choice enrolled 1990–94	3 Choice nonselect 1990–94	4 Attrition 1990–93	5 Low-income MPS 1991	6 MPS control 1991
Income (%)						
$0–$10,000	55	56	53	58	53	36
$10,000–$20,000	29	30	29	27	29	21
$20,000–$35,000	16	15	17	15	14	24
$35,000 & over	1	0	1	1	3	21
Mean income ($1,000)	11.63	11.34	12.24	11.77	12.13	22.00
(*N*)	(1,020)	(627)	(325)	(293)	(880)	(1,513)
Race (%)						
African American	75	73	78	75	67	55
Asian	0	0	0	0	5	4
Hispanic	19	21	14	16	11	10
Native American	0	0	1	1	1	1
White	5	5	4	7	15	29
Other	1	0	3	1	1	1
(*N*)	(2,673)	(1,490)	(886)	(676)	(3,179)	(5,365)
Mother education (%)						
Non–HS grad	25	24	27	24	46	33
HS grad	20	21	19	19	25	28
Some college	46	46	46	48	26	29
College grad & +	8	9	8	9	4	11
(*N*)	(1,029)	(626)	(333)	(292)	(881)	(1,525)
Parent married (%)	25	24	30	24	35	51
(*N*)	(1,032)	(633)	(331)	(294)	(924)	(1,637)
Children per family	2.54	2.5	2.66	2.72	3.24	2.95
(*N*)	(1,060)	(645)	(343)	(287)	(908)	(1,611)

TABLE 3
Scale Data–Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability, and Sample Size

Source of scale, range, and direction by group	*M*	*SD*	α	(*N*)
Frequency of parent contacting school (PiParScl), Range = 0–21 (high = more)				
Choice applied 1990–94 (fall)	8.8	4.9	0.79	775
Choice enrolled 1990–94 (fall)	8.6	5.1	0.81	466
Low-income MPS control 1991	5.8	4.4	0.79	807
MPS control 1991	6.0	4.3	0.78	1,529
Choice private school 1991–95 (spring)	9.4	4.8	0.78	722
Frequency of school contacting parent (PiSclPar), Range = 0–12 (high = more)				
Choice applied 1990–94 (fall)	3.6	2.9	0.67	811
Choice enrolled 1990–94 (fall)	3.7	2.9	0.67	495
Low-income MPS control 1991	2.7	2.5	0.67	834
MPS control 1991	2.7	2.5	0.65	1,594
Choice private school 1991–95 (spring)	4.4	2.9	0.70	740
Parental involvement in school organizations (PiSclOrg), Range = 0–5 (high = more)				
Choice applied 1990–94 (fall)	2.4	1.5	0.71	788
Choice enrolled 1990–94 (fall)	2.4	1.5	0.72	481
Low-income MPS control 1991	1.7	1.3	0.67	831
MPS control 1991	1.9	1.4	0.67	1,586
Choice private school 1991–95 (spring)	3.0	1.3	0.54	731
Parental involvement in educational activities with child (PiChild), Range = 0–15 (high = more)				
Choice applied 1990–94 (fall)	8.7	3.5	0.76	987
Choice enrolled 1990–94 (fall)	8.8	3.5	0.76	619
Low-income MPS control 1991	7.5	4.3	0.85	833
MPS control 1991	6.9	4.2	0.83	1,575
Choice private school 1991–95 (spring)	8.9	3.8	0.81	737
Dissatisfaction with prior school (DisPrScl), Range = 8–32 (high = more dissatisfied)				
Choice applied 1990–94 (fall)	16.5	5.5	0.89	646
Choice enrolled 1990–94 (fall)	16.4	5.7	0.89	406
Low-income MPS control 1991	14.4	4.2	0.85	636
MPS control 1991	14.5	4.2	0.85	1,224
Choice private school 1991–95 (spring)	13.6	4.9	0.90	604

in contrast with 3.24 and 2.95 for the MPS samples.[7]

Table 3 and part of Table 4 complete the picture of Choice families. Table 3 reports the means of scales constructed from a series of questions concerning parental involvement and satisfaction with prior and current schools. There are four separate dimensions of parental involvement, all of which have very good scaling properties and produce dramatic and highly statistically significant results in comparison with either MPS control group. For all forms of parental involvement—contacts with schools, organizational involvement, or home involvement—Choice parents reported considerably greater involvement than MPS parents.

Finally, there was evidence that Choice parents were very dissatisfied with their former (MPS) schools; there may have been good reason for it, as indicated by test scores taken in MPS prior to students enrolling in Choice. In terms of attitudes, the judgment of Choice parents of their child's prior public school was especially harsh in contrast with the MPS control groups. The last panel in Table 3 provides the dissatisfaction of parents with MPS schools (Rows 1 to 4) and the same measure later for Choice parents views' of their private schools (Row 5). As is apparent from the means of the scales, Choice parents viewed their prior public schools much less favorably than the MPS control groups. The differences in means are statistically significant at the .001 level and are substantively quite large (approximately 0.4 standard deviations less favorable). The two items that elicited the greatest alienation were "the quality of education" and "discipline" (Witte, Thorn, Pritchard, & Claibourn, 1994; Witte & Thorn, 1996).

Prior test scores of Choice students provided fur-

TABLE 4
Mean NCEs, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, 1990–1994

	Choice		Low-income MPS		MPS control	
	R	*M*	*R*	*M*	*R*	*M*
1990						
Prior scores [a]	39.1	39.7	40.1	42.0	43.6	45.8
1990	40.0	39.2	37.5	39.5	39.5	41.6
1991	41.8	39.1	38.2	42.2	40.5	44.2
Change score	+1.8	–0.1	+0.7	+2.7***	+1.0*	+2.6***
(*N*)[b]	(84)	(88)	(812)	(792)	(1,048)	(1,029)
1991						
Prior scores	37.5	37.9	40.2	42.9	43.7	46.3
1991	39.8	39.0	38.0	41.6	40.0	43.4
1992	35.9	38.4	38.4	41.3	40.5	43.1
Change score	–3.9***	–0.6	+0.4	–0.3	+0.5	–0.3
(*N*)	(192)	(198)	(911)	(895)	(1,173)	(1,148)
1992						
Prior scores	40.0	40.3	40.2	42.4	43.9	46.0
1992	38.7	38.3	39.5	42.2	40.8	43.2
1993	38.3	42.7	38.8	41.0	40.1	42.0
Change score	–0.4	+4.4***	–0.7	–1.2**	–0.8	–1.2*
(*N*)	(282)	(288)	(873)	(842)	(973)	(938)
1993						
Prior scores	38.0	40.0	40.2	42.0	43.3	45.2
1993	37.6	44.0	38.8	41.8	40.1	42.8
1994	37.5	42.0	35.6	41.5	39.9	42.7
Change score	–0.1	–2.0**	–0.2	–0.3	–0.2	–0.1
(*N*)	(289)	(281)	(688)	(678)	(766)	(755)

[a] Prior scores mean any prior test in MPS, regardless of the year taken. Choice priors are for all applicants, whether or not they enrolled in a Choice school.

[b] (*N*) means the number of students tested in both 1990 and 1991. Only Choice students enrolled in private schools for the full year were included.

*Probability < .05 change score differs from 0. **Probability < .01 change score differs from 0. ***Probability < .001 change score differs from 0.

ther evidence supporting parent dissatisfaction with their children's prior schools. As indicated in Table 4, "Prior scores," Choice students were achieving considerably less than MPS students and somewhat less than the low-income MPS students. The averages are normal curve equivalents (NCE), which are standardized transformations of national percentile rankings. For the national population, NCEs have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 18. Thus, it is apparent that for all students, they are below national averages. Choice students were statistically significantly below (at the .05 level) the full MPS sample each year on both tests and below the low-income sample on three of the eight prior tests.

Choice applicants were also asked why they applied to the Choice Program. "Educational quality" led the list, eliciting an 89% "very important" response. That was followed by "teaching approach and style," 86%; "discipline," 75%; "general educational atmosphere," 74%; and "classroom size," 72% (Witte, Thorn, & Sterr, 1995, Table 3). Although this list is not surprising, it is relevant that several of the top categories—"educational quality" and "discipline"—were also the most alienating issues in Choice parents' assessment of their prior public schools.

The portrait of Choice students and families is thus complex and not simple to interpret. On one hand, the program clearly demonstrated that a program could successfully be targeted on poor families who have had bad experiences in their prior public schools. Thus, the program created the type of equalizing opportunity that was intended. On the other hand, one could also argue that the program is depriving the public schools of families who have more educated parents and who are actively involved in their children's education—in short, the type of parents who could potentially aid in reform efforts.

Outcomes: Effects on Families and Students

Outcomes are broken down simply into effects on families and students and then on schools. In each set of results, there are outcomes that most people would interpret positively and negatively. Given the complex normative issues surrounding vouchers, as outlined above, I let the reader reach his or her own judgment. I count among the positive results positive parental attitudes toward Choice schools (in contrast to prior public schools), positive attitudes toward the program, increased parental involvement, and some benefits for most of the private schools. More critical results, certainly as interpreted by foes of vouchers, include similar test score gains for Choice and MPS students, seemingly high attrition from the program, and the collapse of three private schools in mid-year.

Attitudes and parental involvement. Too often, outcomes of experiments in education are reduced to their effects on "achievement." Although any sensible conceptualization of "achievement" would extend well beyond standardized test scores, the vast majority of evaluations of educational programs focus, often exclusively, on test score results. That is not the case in this study. Parents of Choice students were surveyed as they applied to the program and at the end of each subsequent year. Thus, we are able to ascertain their attitudes toward their prior schools and compare them to their attitudes toward the Choice private schools. And all of those attitude comparisons are extremely positive.[8]

Satisfaction of Choice parents with private schools was just as dramatic as dissatisfaction was with prior public schools. As noted in the last section, Choice parents were much less satisfied with their public schools than either the average MPS parent or the low-income group. Exactly the reverse occurs when parents respond to the same questions for private schools. As discussed above, the last panel in Table 3 indicates the level of school dissatisfaction with prior public schools and, for Choice students, the cumulative dissatisfaction over five years with private schools.

The results were a dramatic reversal—high levels of dissatisfaction with prior public schools, but considerable satisfaction with private schools. There were eight questions in the school satisfaction scale. The four-point Likert ratings ranged from *very satisfied* to *very dissatisfied.* Thus, 13.6 meant that most parents were from very to somewhat satisfied on all measures. Interestingly, the two measures on which parents were least satisfied in the public schools—"educational environment" and "discipline"—were the areas of greatest satisfaction in the private schools.

These results were consistent with several other indicators of satisfaction. On both pre- and post-surveys, parents were asked to grade their schools on an *A*-to-*F* scale. The comparative results from prior schools again indicated much greater satisfaction with the private schools. On a 4.0 scale, the average grade for prior schools for both Choice applicants and those who enrolled was 2.4, while the grade for private schools was 3.0. This compared to an average grade for the MPS control groups of 2.8 (Witte et al., 1994, Table 7; Witte et al., 1995, Table 7).

There was also, in each year, overwhelming support among participants that the Choice program should continue. The positive responses averaged 98%, even in the first year, when a school went bankrupt and almost 90 students ended their year in MPS schools. Those parents overwhelmingly supported the program (Witte et al., 1994, p. 20).

Finally, parental involvement, which was clearly very high for Choice parents before they enrolled in the program, increased while their children were in private schools. As indicated in Table 3, comparing the prior involvement of parents of students who enrolled in Choice (fall) to private school involvement, parental involvement increased on all dimensions. The differences were statistically significant at the .05 level on school contacts and organizations, but not on involvement at home. Part of the reason for this increase may have been that some of the private schools required participation and made parents sign parental involvement agreements. However, these were involved parents from the beginning, and at best, the contracts would have been a marginal incentive.

Achievement test scores. Extensive analysis of achievement results, with all the glorified technicalities, are presented elsewhere (Witte, 1997, in press). However, the results of the more complex presentation do not alter in any way the conclusions drawn from the core data presented in Tables 4 to 8. The general conclusion is that there is no substantial difference over the life of the program between the Choice and MPS students, especially the low-income MPS students. On a positive note, estimates for the overall samples, while always below national norms, do not substantially decline as the students enter higher grades. This is not the normal pattern in that usually inner-city student average scores decline relative to national norms in higher grades. That these students held their own is a positive result for the city as whole.[9]

The raw scores are presented in Table 4. The year-to-year change scores indicate the general pattern, which does not change dramatically with subsequent, much more complex analysis. They apply to students who had valid tests in both years. For Choice students, five of the eight change scores do not significantly differ from zero, while three do—one negative reading score and one positive and one negative math score. For the low-income MPS sample, the results are similar. Two of the eight scores differ from zero—one positive math score and one negative math score. Adding the change scores across the four years, results in the following: Choice ($R = -2.6$; $M = +1.7$); low-income MPS

TABLE 5

Estimated Iowa Test of Basic Skills, 1991–94, Student Record Database Variables Only (b, SE of b)

	Reading		Math	
Independent variable	Choice indicator	Choice Program years	Choice indicator	Choice Program years
Prior reading	0.495*** (0.014)	0.495*** (0.014)	0.546*** (0.014)	0.546*** (0.014)
Prior math	0.170*** (0.012)	0.170*** (0.013)	0.170*** (0.015)	0.170*** (0.015)
Test grade	–0.176 (0.091)	–0.175 (0.091)	–1.089*** (0.100)	–1.086*** (0.100)
Gender (1 = female)	1.559*** (0.366)	1.562*** (0.366)	–0.065 (0.400)	–0.065 (0.400)
African American	–3.911*** (0.546)	–3.915*** (0.546)	–4.182*** (0.599)	–4.182*** (0.599)
Hispanic	–1.599* (0.725)	–1.617* (0.726)	–1.546 (0.795)	–1.568* (0.796)
Other minority	–2.435* (1.047)	–2.439* (1.047)	0.288 (1.151)	0.284 (1.152)
Low income	–2.510*** (0.577)	–2.506*** (0.577)	–1.431* (0.633)	–1.429*
Choice indicator	–0.568 (0.484)	—	–0.109 (0.527)	—
Choice Program Year 1	—	0.100 (0.818)	—	–0.682 (0.894)
Choice Program Year 2	—	–1.200 (0.734)	—	0.059 (0.801)
Choice Program Year 3	—	–0.093 (0.875)	—	0.564 (0.946)
Choice Program Year 4	—	–1.394 (1.411)	—	–0.823 (1.541)
Constant	18.131*** (0.971)	18.123*** (0.971)	22.260*** (1.060)	22.249*** (1.061)
Adjusted R^2	0.46	0.46	0.46	0.49
F statistic	446.32	441.23	498.60	487.23
Probability $F = 0$	.000	.000	.000	.000
Dependent M	40.09	40.09	42.48	42.48
Dependent SD	16.98	16.98	18.83	18.83
(N)	(4,716)	(4,716)	(4,653)	(4,653)

*Probability that B = 0 < .05. **Probability that B = 0 < .01. ***Probability that B = 0 < .001.

TABLE 6

Estimated Iowa Test of Basic Skills, 1991–94, Full Variables Set (b, SE of b)

	Reading		Math	
Independent variable	Choice indicator	Choice Program years	Choice indicator	Choice Program years
Prior reading	0.433***	0.436***	0.535***	0.533***
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Prior math	0.177***	0.174***	0.150***	0.151***
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.029)
Test grade	–0.020	–0.036	–1.285***	–1.296***
	(0.167)	(0.168)	(0.192)	(0.194)
Gender (1 = female)	2.508***	2.517***	1.486*	1.488*
	(0.657)	(0.657)	(0.755)	(0.756)
African American	–3.737***	–3.762***	–5.112***	–5.13***
	(0.930)	(0.929)	(1.081)	(1.083)
Hispanic	–1.144	–1.029	–2.449	–2.389
	(1.173)	(1.174)	(1.357)	(1.361)
Other minority	–3.216	–3.194	–3.384	–3.373
	(2.343)	(2.340)	(2.691)	(2.693)
Income ($1,000)	0.092**	0.092**	0.112**	0.112**
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Mother's education	0.491**	0.499*	0.007	0.012
	(0.260)	(0.260)	(0.301)	(0.302)
Married (1 = yes)	–0.271	–0.304	–0.520	–(0.532)
	(0.792)	(0.792)	(0.911)	(0.913)
PI-schl. cont.	–0.115	–0.112	–0.217*	–0.215*
	(0.090)	(0.090)	(0.103)	(0.103)
PI-par. cont.	0.081	0.080	0.304	0.303
	(0.154)	(0.154)	(0.179)	(0.179)
PI-schl. organ.	0.477	0.469	–0.202	–0.204
	(0.267)	(0.267)	(0.309)	(0.310)
Edu. expectations	0.167	0.180	0.740	0.749
	(0.349)	(0.349)	(0.403)	(0.404)
Choice indicator	–2.154**	—	0.093	—
	(0.749)		(0.864)	
Choice Program Year 1	—	–1.382	—	0.282
		(1.092)		(1.261)
Choice Program Year 2	—	–3.849***	—	–0.464
		(1.024)		(1.187)
Choice Program Year 3	—	–1.256	—	0.190
		(1.225)		(1.410)
Choice Program Year 4	—	–0.410	—	1.297
		(1.852)		(2.131)
Constant	14.947***	14.968***	22.558***	22.574***
	(2.168)	(2.168)	(2.501)	(2.509)
Adjusted R^2	0.50	0.50	0.53	0.53
F statistic	86.15	73.03	97.02	81.60
Probability $F = 0$	.000	.000	.000	.000
Dependent *M*	42.95	42.95	45.37	45.37
Dependent *SD*	16.47	16.47	19.53	19.53
(*N*)	(1,385)	(1,385)	(1,372)	(1,372)

*Probability that B = 0 < .05.

**Probability that B = 0 < .01.

***Probability that B = 0 < .001.

($R = +0.2$; $M = +0.9$); MPS ($R = +0.5$; $M = +1.0$). The Choice advances in math are solely determined by the third-year gains, and the MPS positive math scores by the first-year gains.

Various multivariate models are reported in Tables 5 to 8. The models vary in several ways. First, Table 5 includes only control variables taken from student record databases and does not include any variables obtained from our surveys. Because not all families responded to surveys, Table 5 includes more students, but a less rich set of control variables than does Table 6.

Also captured in Tables 5 to 8 are a number of different ways to model the effects of the Choice Program. Tables 5 and 6 combine all four years of data and provide two models of testing the significance of Choice Program effects. Tables 7 and 8 estimate models for individual years and provide a third method of testing Choice effects. The first method in Tables 5 and 6 is to simply include participation in Choice rather than the MPS control group as a simple indicator variable. This measures the mean effect of being in Choice over four years. The second method breaks the indicator variable into relevant years (Year 1 = 1990–91, etc.), comparing effects for each year against the control group. This allows us to ascertain the effects over the years while controlling for other factors. The final method, as exemplified in Tables 7 and 8, is to determine if there is a longitudinal effect of students being in a Choice school over a number of years.

All of these models have relevance in evaluating program success. Policymakers certainly would be interested in understanding the overall effect of a program intervention. However, they might also be interested in the trend in the program. Does it show variance from year to year, or are the results stable

TABLE 7

Estimated Iowa Test of Basic Skills Reading Score and Student Choice Year 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 (b, SE of b)

Independent variable	1991	1992	1993	1994
Prior reading	0.48***	0.49***	0.49***	0.49***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Prior math	0.18***	0.16***	0.16***	0.19***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Test grade	–0.52**	–0.54**	0.53**	–0.14
	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.21)
Gender (1 = female)	1.13	1.85**	1.32*	2.34**
	(0.76)	(0.71)	(0.68)	(0.76)
Low income	–3.72**	–2.08	–2.37	–4.11**
	(1.28)	(1.27)	(1.41)	(1.65)
African American	–2.85**	–5.52***	–4.21***	–2.84*
	(1.06)	(1.05)	(1.05)	(1.23)
Hispanic	–3.00*	–1.53	–3.23*	–0.17
	(1.52)	(1.51)	(1.38)	(1.49)
Other minority	–1.63	–1.57	–5.21**	–0.28
	(2.11)	(2.00)	(1.93)	(2.36)
Student Choice Year 1	2.05	–1.44	0.57	–1.79
	(1.41)	(1.30)	(1.24)	(1.52)
Student Choice Year 2	NA	–2.45*	1.99	–0.57
		(1.28)	(1.16)	(1.38)
Student Choice Year 3	NA	NA	0.39	–0.13
			(1.29)	(1.28)
Student Choice Year 4	NA	NA	NA	–0.67
				(1.52)
Constant	21.30***	20.82***	15.18***	16.92***
	(2.02)	(1.97)	(2.03)	(2.49)
R^2	0.44	0.44	0.48	0.46
F (df)	97 (1075, 9)	105 (1313, 10)	105 (1274, 11)	78 (1121, 12)
Probability $F = 0$	.000	.000	.000	.000

$*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

over time? Finally, we would also be interested in a learning curve or trend effect for individual students. It could be that students need time to become acclimated to the different approaches applied in the private schools, and thus achievement gains might be delayed. It could also be that as initial enthusiasm with a new school wears off or a student fails to adjust to a different educational style, achievement could drop.

The basic results mirror the descriptive statistics. With some complexities, which will be described, the general conclusion is that there were no consistent differences between Choice and MPS students in value-added achievement scores using any of these modeling approaches. Table 5, which includes more students but fewer control variables, indicates that the control variables all act as anticipated.[10] The two prior tests are always highly significant, with a much larger coefficient on the matched prior test (i.e., reading for reading). Test grade always has a negative sign, but it is only significant for math. Girls do better on reading, but not on math. Minority students do less well than Whites, and low-income students less well than non–low-income students. And with all of these variables controlled, none of the Choice variables is significant, and only the second year reading score even approaches significance (–1.2 with a t value of 1.6).

Table 6, with more variables included, tells a similar story, but the reading result is now significant and favoring the MPS students. Again, the control variables are almost all in the expected direction, with some less significant and some more significant than in Table 5. Of the new variables in this table, "income" and "mother's education" are in the direction expected. Some parental involvement scales seem to be counter to expectations, which indicates that the prior involvement may have been connected to difficulties of their children or their frustration with prior schools. The negative signs on parent involvement at home, which are significant for math, are unclear.

The results of the Choice indicator variables are in the same directions as in Table 5 and are generally not significantly different from zero. The one exception is the negative Choice effect on reading, which is about 1.5 points lower than in Table 5. It is statistically significant at the .01 level. However, when we look at the year effects and compare them with Table 4, it is quite clear that the entire effect is driven by a bad second year in the Choice schools. The reason it may be significant in this table (and not in Table 5) is the inclusion of "mother's education," which is higher in Choice families, thus setting up higher expected scores. As will be discussed below, the reason for the effect in this single year is probably connected to attrition from the program.

The trend over time in student performance has been a very controversial aspect of the Choice Program. Several other authors have claimed a trend effect favoring Choice students. Specifically, they argue, using rejected Choice students as a control, that third- and especially fourth-year Choice students make remarkable gains in math, but (with little explanation) no statistically significant gains in reading (Greene, Peterson, & Du, 1996).[11] That result has been addressed in subsequent research, and the problems will be briefly summarized below.

The analysis presented in Tables 7 and 8 provide trend data in comparison to the MPS control group. Because the data indicate trends for each of the four years, only student record database variables are included. Sample sizes, especially of Choice students, would be very small if survey variables were also incorporated. Inclusion of those variables tended to reduce the levels of significance of the findings in Tables 7 and 8 because of inflated standard errors.

The results again tend to support the conclusion that there is no consistent pattern in achievement score differences across the different tests and years. For reading scores in Table 7, there is only one significant coefficient: a –2.45 NCEs disadvantage for the second-year Choice students in the second year of the program. This result reinforces the pattern indicated in Table 6, where the negative reading result seems to be completely the result of the second program year. Table 7 further pinpoints the effect to the second-year students in 1991–92. As will be discussed below when analyzing attrition, that negative result is not repeated in subsequent years for this first-year (1990) cohort. The only other score in the table that approaches statistical significance is the second year cohort's +1.99 points in the third year (1993). It appears that this Choice cohort (1991) was made up of better students. This result carries over to math scores in Table 8.

Consistent with the descriptive results in Table 4, there appears to be a positive Choice effect for math in the third year for all Choice students. The results for second- and third-year Choice students in 1993 in Table 8 were statistically significant at the .05 level. However, again reinforcing the no-

TABLE 8

Estimated Iowa Test of Basic Skills Math, Student Choice Year 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 (b, SE of b)

Independent variable	1991	1992	1993	1994
Prior math	0.58***	0.59***	0.49***	0.54***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Prior reading	0.13***	0.14***	0.19***	0.20***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Test grade	–1.33***	–1.18***	–1.19***	–0.51
	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.24)
Gender (1 = female)	–0.59	0.11	–0.06	0.24
	(0.80)	(0.77)	(0.75)	(0.85)
Low income	–3.42**	–1.17	–2.11	–3.94*
	(1.33)	(1.37)	(1.55)	(1.86)
African American	–3.26**	–4.63***	–4.42***	–2.07
	(1.10)	(1.13)	(1.16)	(1.37)
Hispanic	–3.68*	–0.44	–1.89	–0.57
	(1.59)	(1.62)	(1.52)	(1.66)
Other minority	–0.47	2.01	0.00	–0.47
	(2.24)	(2.14)	(2.12)	(2.64)
Student Choice Year 1	–2.33	–1.63	1.81	–2.23
	(1.48)	(1.39)	(1.38)	(1.70)
Student Choice Year 2	NA	–1.58	3.03*	0.85
		(1.37)	(1.27)	(1.53)
Student Choice Year 3	NA	NA	2.66*	0.12
			(1.39)	(1.42)
Student Choice Year 4	NA	NA	NA	–0.84
				(1.69)
Constant	24.53***	21.08***	24.24***	18.77***
	(2.10)	(2.13)	(2.23)	(2.80)
R^2	0.52	0.50	0.48	0.47
F (df)	132 (1067, 9)	131(1300, 10)	106 (1246, 11)	81 (1106, 12)
Probability $F = 0$	.000	.000	.000	.000

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

consistent-difference conclusion, these results are not repeated in the fourth year of the program. In that year, nothing approaches significance except the newly admitted Choice cohort, and it does worse than MPS students (–2.23 NCEs).

Thus, combined with the reading results that are in the opposite direction, these results confirm the general conclusion that these is no consistent difference between the Choice students and the control group. This is true for the descriptive statistics, mean effects, program effects, and student trends. And what significant results did emerge will be at least partly explained by attrition from the program as described below.

Why does this analysis not include the reject students? As noted above, Greene et al. (1996), relying exclusively on the Choice/reject comparison, claimed a large and significant difference favoring Choice students in math scores for students remaining in the Choice Program for three or four years. I question the Choice/reject math results based on two major problems: (a) The rejects who remained in the experiment were not a random sample of rejected students, and (b) small sample sizes and outlier effects produced the large result in math.

In subsequent research, I looked at selection and samples size problems in two ways. First, I analyzed the differences between all students who applied and were not selected and those on whom we had subsequent test data. That test data had to come from MPS. Therefore, rejected students who did not enroll in MPS or were not tested essentially dropped out of the experiment. Because most rejects were very young, there was little prior test data on them. However, all applicants were sent surveys, so information exists on both those who later returned to MPS and those who did not. When we initially compared *all* rejects with Choice enrollees, we found few differences among the groups. The most notable were that rejected students were more likely to be Black and their parents had lower educational expectations for their children than parents of selected students (Witte et al., 1994, Table 20). Those differences may, of course, indicate selection biases for all rejects, and they would likely bias reject scores downward.

However, the major problem was with those rejects who, in effect, left the experiment. Both descriptive statistics and a logistic regression indicated that the rejected students who remained in the study were (a) poorer, (b) in higher grades, and (c) from families whose parents were likely to be less educated and were less involved in their children's education than students who disappeared from the program. This makes sense. Rejects were looking to leave MPS in the first place. If not selected for Choice and if they had the means (and especially if their children were young), they left for private schools, either on their own or with the help of privately funded vouchers, or they went to another public school district. Thus the reject "control group" that remained behind in MPS was hardly a random sample of those who applied and were rejected. And all indications suggest those remaining in the experiment were likely to be an educationally weak representation of the initial group (Witte, 1997, in press, chapter 6).

Small samples were a second problem with the Choice/reject comparison, especially when the results focus on one or two years. In such a situation, the scores of a few students could influence the general results. And that is exactly what happened. My prior research more or less reproduced the third- and fourth-year effects (in math only) that favored Choice students and were so widely circulated in the unpublished paper by Greene, Peterson, and Du (1996). However, I then analyzed more carefully the scores of the two sets of students. As one might anticipate from the selection problems outlined above, low reject scores created the difference. For the most significant fourth-year effect, there were only 27 reject students who tried to enter the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in 1990 for whom there were test scores four years later. Of those rejects, 5 students (18.5%) received a score of 1 on the math test. A 1 NCE is the lowest recorded score on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. It often results from a student *simply not filling in the dots* on the test form. There were no similar 1 scores in the Choice schools.[12] The lowest Choice score (of 85 in the fourth year) was 4.

To test the sensitivity of the models, I re-estimated the results, taking out the students from both groups who had scores less than 5 NCEs. The results were quite extraordinary. First, the reading estimates were unaffected—still no differences between Choice and rejects. For math, the coefficient representing the big fourth-year effect was reduced by 40% and was no longer significant by conventional standards. And these results were accomplished by eliminating only seven students who scored the lowest scores on the math test (Witte, 1997, in press, chapter 6).[13]

Thus, unfortunately, the natural experiment, which would have controlled for selection bias, was hopelessly contaminated by systematic attrition from the reject group, and the results were dramatically affected by outlier cases because of small samples.

Attrition from the program. A final concern, as both an outcome measure and as a methodological issue, is the level of attrition from the program. For whatever reasons, the attrition rates from the Choice schools were quite high, although they declined over time. The last two rows in Table 1 provide the relevant statistics. Attrition is defined as leaving a school before a terminal grade is reached. Because students only had to submit to lottery conditions once, subsequent leaving was the result of either family or school choice. Because the program did not require schools to list nonreadmitted students (and they do not have to readmit Choice students), we cannot distinguish between these reasons. For whichever reason, the numbers are, in one sense, substantial.

Annual attrition averaged 33.4% for all Choice schools, and 30.2% if we exclude alternative schools in the Choice Program. The numbers are substantial in the sense that if the Choice Program is to have a major impact for a number of students, those students would have to remain in the Choice schools—and few do. For example, of the initial class of 341 in 1990, four years later, in spring 1994, there were only 57 students left—and very few "had graduated" (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau, 1995, p. 28).

Is attrition itself a measure of Choice school failures? The answer is probably no. Although the numbers appear high, they seem to be in line with the attrition rates in the public schools for the elementary grades. Given data reporting problems on who is in what school in the first month of school, the range of attrition for K to eighth graders was estimated at 22% to 28%, which is close to that in the Choice Program (Witte et al., 1994, p. 22). Thus, attrition appears to be a common problem in inner-city school districts, regardless of the type of school.

Who was likely to leave and for what reasons? The characteristics of leavers varied from year to year, but the four-year profile is interesting and suggestive. A four-year summary is provided in Table 9. The general characteristics of continuing compared to leaving students indicate that Whites and Blacks were somewhat more likely to leave than Hispanics, and boys more likely to leave than girls. Also, students living farther away were more likely to leave.

Perhaps more important, however, it appears that leavers were underachievers in every sense: lower prior scores, lower post scores, and lower change scores. This was reflected in a considerably lower opinion of the private school among leaving parents than those who stayed. This latter difference is as large as the differences were between Choice applicants and MPS parents in appraising their prior public schools (see Table 3, bottom panel). The combination of results makes sense to either explain family choices to not return—the hoped-for educational improvement did not occur—or schools not readmitting lower achieving and nonimproving students.

The four-year pattern of attrition masks important year-to-year variations. Year-to-year data indicate that leavers in the first two years were very different from one another. After the first year, the program was very much up in the air in that the courts had not yet decided its validity and the closing of Juanita Virgil Academy had put political pressure on the program. A number of high-achieving students left that year, presumably pulled out by parent choice. The next year, with the program stabilized, the exact opposite occurred, and this was at least in part induced by the schools not readmitting some of the underachieving and nonimproving students.[14]

The test score means verify these differences. As indicated in Table 10, there was an extraordinary difference in spring test scores between leaving and returning students in the two years. In the first year, leaving students outperformed returning students

TABLE 9

Mean Differences Between Continuing and Attrition Choice Students on Private School Experience, 1990–1993

	1 Continuing students			2 Attrition students			3 Prob. diff. = 0
Variable scale	*M*	*SD*	(*N*)	*M*	*SD*	(*N*)	*p*
Race & gender							
African American	0.72	0.45	1,605	0.75	0.43	684	0.097
Hispanic	0.22	0.42	1,605	0.16	0.37	684	0.000
Other minority	0.02	0.13	1,605	0.02	0.13	684	0.821
White	0.04	0.21	1,605	0.07	0.26	684	0.022
Gender (female = 1)	0.56	0.50	1,596	0.52	0.50	673	0.049
Distance to school	3.07	2.42	1,300	3.36	2.92	547	0.046
Test scores							
Prior RNCE	38.64	15.97	832	36.87	17.68	326	0.115
Post RNCE	38.33	15.54	1,142	36.62	17.01	413	0.073
RNCE diff.	−0.50	14.45	805	−1.86	12.76	312	0.124
Prior MNCE	40.20	18.13	844	37.95	18.83	326	0.065
Post MNCE	40.81	18.39	1,191	37.80	18.07	417	0.004
MNCE diff.	0.91	15.24	818	−1.79	14.95	306	0.008
Parental involvement[a]							
PiParScl	10.59	4.68	644	10.18	5.20	155	0.372
PiSclPar	4.36	2.98	676	4.32	3.09	164	0.896
PiSclOrg	3.08	1.21	669	2.87	1.38	159	0.088
ParChild	9.07	3.62	674	8.70	3.78	164	0.256
Parental attitudes							
DisChScl	13.21	4.26	526	15.29	6.05	108	0.001

[a] For variable abbreviation definitions, see Table 3.

TABLE 10

Achievement Test Score Results of Leaving and Returning Choice Students, 1991 and 1992

	Leaving Choice students		Returning Choice students	
	R	*M*	*R*	*M*
1991: *M* NCE	45.3	42.2	41.6	39.7
(*N*)	(41)	(44)	(129)	(134)
1992: *M* NCE	35.4	35.2	38.4	37.2
(*N*)	(87)	(98)	(238)	(248)

Note. Source: Constructed from Witte et al., 1992, Table 20.

by 3.7 NCEs in reading and 2.5 points in math. In the second year, leaving students were 3.0 NCEs worse than returning students in reading and 2.0 points worse in math.

This difference in attrition is undoubtedly linked to the sharp decline in reading scores in the second year, following an increase in reading in the first year (Tables 4 & 6). As indicated in Table 7, the decline in 1992 is mostly the result of second-year students—those who were indulged for the first year. In the following two years, the remaining students from that first cohort do better in reading, but essentially the same as MPS students. The same phenomenon may well account for the remarkable change in math scores for this cohort. Focusing on Table 8, in 1992, the second-year students have an estimated effect compared to MPS of −1.58 NCEs in math (Table 8, 1992). In 1993, that coefficient changes to a positive (and significant) +2.66 NCEs. Again, and consistent with the reading results, attrition after the second year could account for this sharp improvement.

These attrition levels suggest several other methodological cautions. First, the small sample sizes among Choice students allow for unique selective actions—such as one or two schools changing readmission decisions—to have quite dramatic effects. Second, the overall attrition of Choice students indicates that if a similar attrition did not occur among the Milwaukee sample, the achievement test results could be biased in favor of Choice students. Clearly, over the four-year period, lower achieving students left the Choice Program. A subsequent analysis, correcting for attrition from both samples, indicated that reading differences (which favored MPS) were probably not significant.[15] But the general lesson is that program attrition is a major problem both in terms of policy conclusions and in terms of subsequent evaluations of similar programs.

Several final questions concerning attrition are: Why did students not return? And where did they go? The characteristics of leavers described above indicate that they were not doing as well as students who continued and were much less satisfied with Choice schools. Follow-up survey data tend to confirm that conclusion, although it is far from perfect data. Because those who left were not known until the September following the close of school in June, it was extremely hard to track down nonreturning families. The response rates to mailed and phone surveys were only 38%. We must assume that the largest bias in these responses was missing families who moved out of the Milwaukee area. Telephone searches were impossible for that group.

Parents were asked two open-ended questions: Why did your child leave the Choice Program school? And where is he/she going to school now? Of the reasons parents gave for leaving, only 15% of the responses (and they could give more than one) indicated child- or family-specific reasons—including moving. This category is clearly underestimated, however. Almost all of the remaining responses were critical of some aspect of the Choice Program or the private schools. The leading problems with the program were the lack of religious training, school transportation problems, and difficulties in reapplying to the program (including references to not being readmitted). Within-school problems most often cited were unhappiness with the staff—usually teachers—dissatisfaction with the general quality of education, and perceptions that discipline was too strict. The lack of special programs, which might have been available elsewhere, was also cited in 6% of the responses (Witte et al., 1994, Table 19).

Thus, survey responses fit in with the factors that seem to distinguish attrition students from those who remain—distance and transportation problems, less achievement success, and resulting dissatisfaction with the private schools.

Finally, where did the students go? Survey data were very consistent with later efforts by the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau to track leaving students back to MPS. Survey data indicated that approximately half of the students who left after the second and third year (57%) enrolled in MPS schools, 26% in other private schools in the area (often for religious reasons), with the remaining 16% going to MPS contract schools, home schooling, or schools outside Milwaukee. The Legislative Audit Bureau confirmed that 51.5% of the students had enrolled in MPS (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau, 1995, p. 35).

Outcomes: Effects on Schools

Effects on public schools. Ideally, an analysis of a voucher program would include a study of the impact of vouchers on both private and public schools. Choice supporters argue that competition will improve all schools, including those in the public sector. There are, unfortunately, several research problems that make such a study difficult if not impossible in the Milwaukee case and possibly for a much larger and less targeted voucher program as well. First, in the case of Milwaukee (and now Cleveland), the program was simply too small to have discernible direct effects on the school system. There was no doubt that with the hundreds of media presentations about Milwaukee, usually prefaced by anguished examples of failures of the public schools, the program provided a bully pulpit for public school critics. This may have had indirect effects on MPS. However, given that the number of students enrolled barely reached 1% of the MPS enrollment, direct competition for students was not likely.[16]

The problems of determining the effects of vouchers on public schools are not only a question of size, however. Large inner-city school districts are constantly reforming, experimenting, and reorganizing their schools and systems. The effect is that change is ongoing, and trying to causally distinguish "routine" changes from those specifically tied to the onset of a voucher program will be very difficult if not impossible.

Effects on private schools. Some would argue that publicly subsidizing the improvement of private schools is far from a positive outcome. Others may believe that maintaining and improving all options makes sense in what everyone agrees is a difficult educational environment. Whatever normative spin the reader wants to assume, improvement in many of the surviving Choice schools did occur.

Of the initial seven schools in the Choice Program in 1990, one was a very small, highly regarded, upper-class Montessori school that enrolled only several Choice students. One was a school for extremely-at-risk students (on the verge of dropping out), and the other five were kindergarten-through-eighth-grade schools. Of those, one, Juanita Virgil Academy, with initially 90 students, went bankrupt and closed abruptly in February 1991. The other six survived and remained in the program for the entire five years of this study.

However, two of the surviving schools were on the verge of bankruptcy when the program began. One had declared its intention to close when the program was enacted, and another was in an extremely difficult financial position. It went through three principals in the first year and probably only survived because of an infusion of money and support from a powerful neighborhood community center. These two schools today enroll over 700 children. The school taken over by the community center has managed to build a new and quite beautiful 11-room school attached to the community center. As of this writing, building was beginning on eight more classrooms. Although clearly, the Choice Program alone was not responsible for that new school, it played a role.[17]

The other schools, while their stories are not as dramatic, also improved their facilities, expanded their programs (one adding an additional preschool site), and improved turnover and diversity in their faculty. Indications for the latter are given in Tables 11a to 11c. Turnover and new personnel rates declined substantially over the life of the program. Undoubtedly, this was due to increasing teacher salaries and benefits, but precise data were unavailable. Certification figures are less clear because of the types of certifications available, but the number of teachers with no certification clearly declined.

Correlated with the decline in turnover, the seniority levels of teachers also increased, although they remain well behind average seniority in public schools. Two important facts to note in Table 11b are that after the first year, there were no teachers hired *during* the year (as indicated by the 14% with zero years in 1990–91). Also, in 1990–91, there were only 24% of the teachers with more than four years in the schools. After the Choice Program was created, 52% of the teachers had four or more years of experience.

TABLE 11A

Staff Changes in Choice Schools, 1990–1993

	6 schools		11 schools		9 schools
	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Total classroom [illegible]	55	67	89	99	66
Turnover rate[a]	NA	36%	18%	18%	24%
New personnel rate[b]	35%	56%	16%	29%	22%

[a] Turnover is defined as replacements plus layoffs in year *t* divided by total faculty in year *t* – 1. All turnovers were replacements except for one layoff in 1992–93.

[b] "New personnel rate" is defined as replacements plus expansion personnel in year *t*, divided by total faculty in year *t* – 1. In 1991–92, there were 11 expansion positions and 20 replacements; in 1992–93, there were 12 replacements and –1 expansion positions; in 1993–94, there were 16 replacements and 10 expansion positions. Expansion positions for 1989–90 personnel were not known. However, 35% of the 1990–91 teachers were new that year.

TABLE 11B

Teacher Certification and Seniority in Choice Schools, 1990–1995

	Certification					
	Wisconsin	Other states	Just specialty	Added specialty	None	(*N*)
Certification, 4 schools, 1990–91	62%	8%	6%	0%	24%	(50)
Certification, 6 schools, 1992–94	54%	0%	43%	21%	4%	(28)
Certification, 9 schools, 1994–95	64%	0%	20%	3%	13%	(66)

	Seniority								
	Less than 1	1	2	3	4	5–9	10 or more	Mean years	(*N*)
Seniority, 4 schools, 1990–91	14%	22%	18%	20%	4%	8%	12%	4.2	(50)
Seniority, 6 schools, 1992–94	0%	19%	15%	15%	19%	7%	26%	6.5	(28)

TABLE 11C

Race and Gender of Full-Time Teachers in Choice Schools, 1990–1995

	6 schools		11 schools	12 schools	9 schools
	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
African American	17%	27%	21%	21%	26%
Hispanic	8%	11%	8%	9%	9%
White	75%	62%	70%	70%	62%
Other minority	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%
Female	89%	71%	82%	77%	76%
Male	11%	29%	18%	23%	24%
(*N*)	(55)	(67)	(89)	(107)	(66)

Finally, with 1990–91 as the base year (the teaching force was more or less set before the program was finally enacted), over the course of the program, there was racial and gender diversification among teachers in the schools. Although these schools were primarily minority schools (with one exception), the teaching force was not. One of the reasons for this was that MPS had an aggressive affirmative action program, and minority teachers could easily find much higher paying jobs in the public schools. Over the life of the program, while the trend is not uniform, there was a decline in White teachers from 75 to 62%. This was approximately matched by an increase in males from 11% to 24%.

Finally, continual visits to the schools also confirmed the positive impact of the Choice Program among the major schools. From the beginning, the voucher amount was considerably higher than tuition (more than double) for the three largest schools (accounting for over 80% of the students). These schools fought hard to keep the program going and lobbied extensively for the first round of program expansions.[18] Teachers and principals went out of their way to express their gratitude to influential politicians and were consistently positive in hundreds of media contacts.

Private school failures. A full understanding of the impact of the Choice Program would be incomplete without mention of three Choice schools that went out of existence in mid-year. The first occurred in the first year; the last two in 1995–96. The first case, which was the only one researched for this study, was a case of bankruptcy preceded by very inadequate instruction and administration. By the time the school actually went bankrupt in February 1991, more than half of the students had already quit and returned to MPS (Witte, 1991). The later failures were of one school that was in the program for two and one half years and one school that began in 1995. In both cases, the founders, who were also the directors, are under various criminal charges, including but not limited to mishandling and embezzlement of public funds. Three hundred fifty-six students were in these schools, and the state lost an estimated $390,000 in funds that were paid for education that never occurred (*Education Week*, February 21, 1996, p. 3; *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 21, 1996, p. B1).

Thus, as with the effects on students and families, school effects of the Milwaukee voucher experiment are mixed. For most schools, the program was a welcome source of support. In a minority of schools, not only were public moneys wasted, but also precious months of children's education. To assume that vouchers will not be subject to some corruption and abuse and that simply pumping money into private schools will automatically enhance education and create great schools is hopelessly naive. But these problems are offset by the enhanced opportunities provided for families who otherwise could not afford a private school alternative.

Conclusions

Although somewhat frustrating, the mixed results of the Milwaukee voucher program are what we might anticipate from a very controversial program applied to an inner-city educational system. Controversy exists for a reason. Studies comparing public and private school achievement have reached varying conclusions. And claims favoring private schools were often questioned because of the problem of unmeasured selection bias. So why, in a program that required random assignment, would one assume that the private schools would work miracles that the public schools could not? And given that vouchers were provided to schools with no requirements other than being registered private schools, why would one assume that the quality of these schools would be uniformly high? More realistic assumptions would be that educational results and the quality of schools would vary, and that is what our research found.

One final point must be addressed. This study is of a targeted and limited voucher program. But the Milwaukee program also exemplifies the tendency to expand vouchers to a much wider population. The 1995 expansion, which has just been approved by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, expanded the program to include religious schools, many more students, and students already in private schools.[19] If that becomes law after an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court and later just a few more words were removed from the statute, the result would be an open-ended voucher program. The mayor of Milwaukee, John Norquist, has already proposed removing all income limits on the program (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 5, 1998, p. 5A). In that case, the outcomes presented here might look very different.

The strongest argument for vouchers in this article is equal opportunity. The program clearly provided an opportunity for some poor families, whose children were not doing well in public schools, to obtain an alternative education that it is unlikely they could have afforded on their own. Would an open-ended voucher program produce the same results? We do not know. However, we can be quite confident that at least in the short term the students likely to benefit from vouchers would differ considerably from those who received them in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Without income constraints or random selection, and given that most students attend private schools for religious purposes, it is reasonable to assume that the current private school population would be a good guide to those who will benefit under an open-ended voucher program. And they are not poor, minority families. In Milwaukee, based on 1990 census data, they are quite the opposite. The average private school family made over $42,000 a year compared to $25,000 for the average public school family. In terms of race, 84% of private school children in Milwaukee were White, whereas only 33% of the public school children were White (Witte & Thorn, 1995, Table 6). To open this program up to everyone, which certainly is the direction of change, would undoubtedly produce a very different program with very different consequences.

Notes

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[1] A planned voucher experiment in the early 1970s, the Alum Rock experiment, in a small district near San Jose, California, never included private schools. They were to be included under the original experimental design, but were eliminated at the insistence of the local teachers association (for details, see Witte & Rigdon, 1993). A number of other countries subsidize private schools in many ways. However, those systems vary considerably in terms of public school arrangements. Also, no other country has the unique characteristic of almost total nonregulation of private schools because of the separation of church and state that has developed because of our First Amendment to the Constitution.

[2] Information in this section comes primarily from Witte and others (1994, 1995).

[3] This change is extremely important because most students were admitted to the Choice Program in those grades. Private schools, in general, prefer to limit lateral entry at higher grades and therefore have a grade structure with more students in the lower grades.

[4] The average response rates for the first (fall) Choice surveys were 44%; the second (spring) surveys were 46%; the rate for the MPS sample was 32%. Although the response rates were low relative to face-to-face interviews with national samples, they were higher than the approximately 20% response rates that MPS reported for its usual surveys. Independent measures of race and qualification for free lunches existed from the Milwaukee student record database for both the random sample and the Choice students. Thus, it was possible to assess sampling bias and construct weights to offset that bias. For MPS, the only statistically significant sampling bias was for race, where we had a less-than-expected response for African Americans, oversampling of Asians and Whites, and a slight undersample of low-income families. For Choice students, there was a disproportionately high response from African Americans and a low response from Hispanics. The results presented in this article are for unweighted samples.

Scales and demographic variables were also analyzed using three weights: a weight based on expected race, a weight based on expected low/non-low income, and a weight combining both race and income. The combined race and income weight is the most accurate because for the MPS respondents, the sampling bias for race was considerably larger than income; the income-weighted analysis produced no significant differences except on the income variable itself. The race/income analysis produced only one marginally significant difference on attitude scale means. It also produced significantly different effects for household income, percent of female parents on Aid to Families With Dependent Children (welfare), and the percentage of single-parent families. Analysis of the weighted Choice sample produced no differences that approached significance at the .05 level.

[5] Comparative standardized test data were only available during the first four years because MPS ceased giving most Iowa tests after 1994. They were replaced by required state tests.

[6] Wisconsin allows school districts to contract with secular private schools to educate preschool and at-risk students. The contracts are yearly and average about 80% of the per-member cost in the public school district. A number of independent private schools that had a history of contracting unsuccessfully fought the voucher program, advocating instead expansion of contracting options. Most of them later refused to enter the Choice Program.

[7] This difference is statistically significant at the .01 level. Whereas it may appear to be quite small substantively, in terms of long-term demographic trends, this difference in fertility would be very substantial.

[8] Surveys of Choice parents, conducted in June of each year, were returned by an average 46% of the parents. All surveys, pre- and post-, were sent twice. It is difficult to determine biases in the responses. Would more pleased or angry parents be more likely to respond? Even if the response bias favors more favorably disposed par-

ents, the reported differences between pre- and post-attitudes are extremely large.

[9] It is not as clear that the Choice students held their own as it is for the MPS students. The reason is that the original MPS sample was unchanged, except for attrition, whereas new students entered the Choice Program each year. Because Choice students were admitted in the very lowest grades, the MPS sample "aged" more than did the Choice sample.

[10] The results in Tables 5 and 6 are stacked, and thus, a student may appear more than once in different years. This could violate the ordinary least squares (OLS) assumption of independence of error terms. The standard correction for this is to use the Huber/White corrections to recompute standard errors of the estimators. Application of that correction had no appreciable effect, and therefore, ordinary OLS estimates are reported (see Huber, 1967; White, 1980).

[11] Large differences among groups in math with no differences in reading are highly suspect given that math and reading scores are very highly correlated for large populations.

[12] The data do not contain the original answers to each question so it cannot be determined if students missed all of the questions or large blocks—which would be indicative of not filling in the dots. However, adding to the speculation that these students simply did not do the test is that those same five students scored an average of 31 on their math tests in the prior (1993) year.

[13] Eliminating 2 Choice students raised the average on math of the remaining 83 students' 1994 post-tests by only 0.9 NCE. However, eliminating 5 reject students raised the average of the remaining 22 students by 6.5 NCEs.

[14] The author had a conversation to this effect with the principal of one of the largest schools. He said, "We were very lax the first year because we knew these kids needed readjusting to our style. However, by the end of the second year, it was clear they were not working out and we let a number go."

[15] MPS also experienced attrition and did not test every student each year. In a detailed study of achievement scores, the regressions were rerun inserting a Heckman correction for attrition (Heckman, 1979). The Mills ratio was significant, and the re-estimated reading difference between Choice and MPS proved to be insignificant because of inflated standard errors (Witte, 1997).

[16] During the first years of the program, the reverse may have occurred. MPS was overcrowded, and very early in the semester in each of the first two years, the MPS administration wanted lists of students enrolled in Choice private schools because a number of those students had also signed up for MPS schools. The administration wanted to release seats of Choice students and give them to other students.

[17] The new school cost approximately $3.2 million, not including donated labor. Of that, $1.7 million came in the form of a HUD grant to the community center, and $1.6 million was raised in the community, primarily from corporations and wealthy donors. Two retired businessmen led the fundraising efforts, and a Democratic congressman was influential in securing the HUD grant.

[18] Their position on expanding to parochial schools in 1995 is not unified, however. The original sponsor of the legislation, Rep. Polly Williams (D-Milwaukee), whose district includes the two biggest schools, has subsequently introduced legislation to drop parochial schools and return to the original program.

[19] The 1995 changes in the statute seem to match Governor Thompson's original intent. In legislation he proposed in 1989, a program limited to free-lunch-eligible students would have included parochial schools and students already in those schools (in grades K–6). There was no limit on the total number of students, and all of Milwaukee County, not just the city, would have been included.

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Author

JOHN F. WITTE is a professor in the Department of Political Science and Robert LaFollette Institute of Public Affairs, 1225 Observatory Drive, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706. His specialties are public policy and political theory.

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Free Market Policies and Public Education

What Is the Cost of Choice?

Both advocates and opponents of vouchers set forth arguments that, while tremendously passionate, are based largely on ideology, with minimal or only selective reliance on factual evidence. Mr. Metcalf and Ms. Tait examine what is currently known about voucher programs and proposals, in order to promote a better understanding of the issue.

PAROCHI
F
PRIVATE
SECULAR

BY KIM K. METCALF AND
POLLY A. TAIT

WHILE SCHOOL choice programs can take many forms, each of which raises issues regarding the role and scope of public education, voucher programs — proposals to provide families with public funds to be

KIM K. METCALF is the director of the Indiana Center for Evaluation, School of Education, Indiana University, Bloomington, where POLLY A. TAIT is a research assistant.

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used at the public or private school of their choice — are undoubtedly the most hotly debated alternative.

Both advocates and opponents of vouchers set forth arguments that, while tremendously passionate, are based largely on ideology, with minimal or only selective reliance on factual evidence. The result has been an antagonistic, vocal, highly visible confrontation between "believers" and "nonbelievers." Because the voucher issue has the potential to result in substantial changes in public education and will affect the lives of millions of children, it is important to examine what is known about voucher programs and proposals as the debate continues.

Toward this end, we will discuss questions related to the impetus for including voucher programs among the options provided by the current choice movement, the nature or structure of existing school voucher programs, and the findings of research on the effects of those voucher programs. It must be acknowledged at the outset that definitive answers about the fundamental goodness of publicly funded voucher programs are not now available and may never be. Our present purpose is merely to promote a better understanding of the issue.

> The case for parents to have greater choice and voice in their children's education is made by those of all political stripes.

Voucher Programs And School Choice

The school choice movement — the notion of providing children and families with options for the school and educational program in which they participate without regard for the neighborhood in which they live — includes a broad range of approaches. Among the many examples are magnet schools, alternative schools, charter schools, tax credits for private school tuition, intradistrict choice plans, interdistrict choice plans, and even alternative programs within a single school. Each of these, to varying degrees, offers parents the ability to select for their children educational options in curriculum, instruction, and philosophical contexts. Such programs are available, if not required by legislation, in each of the 50 states and in most moderate to large school districts.

Greater choice is made possible by providing families with money (in the form of a voucher) that can be used for tuition in any participating school, usually including both public and private schools. As a result, voucher programs differ from most other choice programs in at least three important ways. First, and usually most contentiously, the programs allow parents to use the voucher to select from among both public and private schools. Virtually all other choice proposals allow choice only among public schools or programs, though charter schools are, arguably, neither fully public nor fully private. Second, all currently operating voucher programs include schools with religious affiliations. The state-funded voucher program in Milwaukee was an exception until recent court rulings allowed the program to expand to include both secular and religious private schools. Third, unlike other choice approaches, 14 of the 16 existing voucher programs in the U.S. operate on private rather than public funding.[1] It may be in this regard that they present their greatest threat to public education.

What Are the Arguments For Voucher Programs?

The case for parents to have greater choice and voice in their children's education is made by those of all political stripes and persuasions, from far right to far left; by members of majority and minority ethnic groups; by the wealthy and the poor, by the religious and the secular. Thus it is difficult to state precisely a single case that represents the position of choice advocates, particularly advocates of vouchers.

For some, the importance of vouchers lies in providing poor families, particularly those living in inner cities, the opportunity for educational choice that more affluent families have always possessed.[2] By this argument, families with even moderate incomes routinely choose their children's school by the school district or neighborhood in which they choose to live. For families with higher incomes, additional choices are available through personally funded private school enrollment. Poor families have little or no choice in where they reside, often being forced to live in neighborhoods near the most dangerous and least effective schools. Voucher programs would diminish the inequality of available choices by providing more options for poor families.

Other advocates believe that allowing parents choices in the schools their children attend would promote greater competition among schools and thus would improve the quality of schools and encourage innovative approaches to education.[3] The current public monopoly on education reduces or eliminates incentives for school improvement or experimentation because there is no "market share" to be gained or lost. Ineffective schools, no matter how effectiveness may be defined, suffer no ill consequences, and highly effective schools receive no tangible benefits. Such a system not only fails to support success but, combined with highly regulatory bureaucracies, promotes maintenance of the status quo. Change and innovation are implicitly discouraged through unnecessary red tape and the difficulties associated with obtaining official sanction or approval.

According to advocates, voucher programs would allow — even force — all schools to be as effective as private schools have been.[4] Private school students routinely achieve at higher levels than public school students, students behave more appropriately in private schools, and parents are more satisfied with the quality of their children's education in private schools.[5] These valuable outcomes of private schooling result, at least in part, from the competitive market-driven context within which private schools must survive, according to voucher proponents. Unlike public schools, private schools must meet the needs of a sufficient number of students and families to remain financially viable. As a result, private schools focus more on students' needs, on the interests and input of parents, and on ensuring that clearly defined goals for student learning and behavior are reached. Voucher programs would force every school, whether public or private, to become more accountable in order to remain viable. Parents would choose to send their children to schools that best met their needs, and less desirable schools would be forced to change or close.

How Strong Is the Voucher Movement?

While many of these arguments seem extreme and perhaps even a bit naive, they reflect the perceptions of a huge proportion of parents in the U.S.[6] More than 95% of adults in the U.S. believe that parents should be allowed greater choice regarding their children's education. When asked whether they would support the redirection of some current education funding to provide vouchers with which parents could enroll their children in the public or private schools of their choice, 50% of *public school* parents said yes.[7] Further, approximately 40% of current public school parents would send their children to a private school if they were awarded a publicly funded voucher.[8] Among minority families and those living in the inner city, more than 80% of parents believe that state-funded vouchers are a desirable and an important approach to improving education. It is clear that school choice in its many forms, and particularly voucher programs supporting enrollment in both public and private schools, is likely to continue to grow.[9]

What Is the Extent Of the Voucher Movement?

To date, only two publicly funded voucher programs are operational: in Cleveland, Ohio, and in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The ambitious statewide voucher program in Florida will soon join this list. However, privately funded voucher programs currently operate in 14 cities across the country, and new programs, both publicly and privately funded, are in varying stages of development in at least 33 other cities. None of these programs serve more than a small percentage of eligible students within their regions, and most have been operating for only a few years. In spite of this, the character of these programs and the threat they pose to the long-standing nature and status of public education have raised the visibility of the issue and intensified the already emotional debate over the future not just of voucher programs but of public education in this country.[10]

The passionate and emotional rhetoric that accompanies almost any discussion of the voucher issue stands in nearly inverse relation to the amount of evidence that exists about the effects of vouchers on students, teachers, families, or schools. In total, only a handful of studies are available that have systematically examined either public or privately funded voucher programs. A lack of supporting evidence has never served to diminish the number or the fervor of stakeholders in any educational discussion, and in this regard the voucher issue is not unusual. However, the fundamental questions that voucher programs raise about the role and nature of public education and the ideological bases that underlie positions for or against vouchers seem to promote greater vehemence, passion, and unsupported speculation about them than might otherwise be expected. Thus more and more voucher programs are proposed and implemented. Opponents rage about their lack of effectiveness, the damage they do to public schools, and the racial, ethnic, and economic segregation they will cause, while advocates hold up the improvements that will accrue to education through the increased competition, greater family involvement, and increased accountability that they believe vouchers will create.

What Do We Know About Voucher Programs?

During the past two years, we and our colleagues have been involved in an ongoing evaluation of the effects of the publicly funded voucher program in Cleveland, Ohio. During this time, we have become acutely aware of the tremendous confusion that exists over the effects, real and assumed, of voucher programs in the U.S. As noted above, there are few studies from which facts about voucher programs can be drawn, and these provide confusing — even contradictory — results. Unfortunately, though perhaps not surprisingly, this confusion has allowed those on both sides of the issue to selectively use research results to support their positions, and highly publicized scholarly infighting among researchers involved in the issue has further undermined public confidence in the utility of educational research and the honesty of those who conduct it.[11]

There are few definitive answers about the effects of voucher programs. Too little evidence is available. Further, because much of the research on voucher programs has been conducted by advocates wishing to "legitimize" or "validate" the programs, the research reports are often made public through webpages or press releases and are seldom subjected to peer review. However, an awareness and understanding of the nature and findings of the existing research may help, if only slightly, to cool the inflammatory character of the debate. To that end, each of the currently available studies of publicly funded voucher programs is reviewed below. The goal of this endeavor is not to critique the research, but rather to make the reader aware of what has been done and what remains to be done as the voucher debate continues.

Research on Publicly Funded Voucher Programs

As noted earlier, privately funded voucher programs outnumber publicly funded programs by about seven to one. In spite of their numbers, privately funded voucher programs are much more limited in size and scope than publicly funded programs, serving small numbers of children within limited geographic regions and providing proportionally smaller tuition vouchers. Further, state-funded voucher programs will always be subject to substantially different sets of expectations and requirements, leading them to develop structures and methods of operation that are likely to be considerably different from privately funded programs. In addition, very little research is available on these programs, and all of it has been conducted by sponsors of the programs. For these reasons, the current review is limited to studies of the two publicly funded voucher programs: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Grant Program.

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was initiated in 1990. When implemented, the program provided up to $2,500 in private school tuition for children in families whose income did not exceed 1.75 times the national poverty level. The funds used to provide the vouchers were deducted from state general equalization aid to the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). To be eligible, children had to have attended a Milwaukee public school during the preceding academic year, and the total number of vouchers awarded was not to exceed 1% of the total MPS enrollment. Qualifying schools, elementary through high school, were to be nonsectarian, to admit voucher students randomly and without discrimination, and to maintain voucher enrollments at 49% or less of total enrollment.

In its initial year, the Milwaukee program provided vouchers to 341 students enrolled in seven private schools. The program has expanded over time; it enrolled 6,000 students in 86 schools during the 1998-99 year and provided vouchers of nearly $5,000. Perhaps the most significant change in the program came in 1998, when the U.S. Supreme Court let stand the Wisconsin supreme court ruling that the program can include religiously affiliated schools without violating the state's constitution. The program's constitutionality continues to be in question, with appeals likely to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program continues to generate heated debate.

To date, three studies of the Milwaukee voucher program have been conducted. The original and most comprehensive study was that of John Witte and his colleagues, who were selected by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to conduct a multi-year evaluation of all aspects of the program.[12] Witte and his colleagues released annual reports during each of the first five years of the program, after which funding for evaluation of the program was discontinued. Shortly after the release of the fourth-year report, two studies of the program in which the original data were reanalyzed were released: one by Jay Greene, Paul Peterson, and Jingtao Du and the other by Cecilia Rouse.[13]

Beginning in 1990, Witte and his associates collected data on the students, schools, and families that participated in the choice program. The fundamental effectiveness of the program was judged by comparing data from participating students and families with those from nonparticipating MPS students and families.[14] The primary sources of data were student school records (including achievement test scores, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches, and so on), records maintained by the voucher program office (e.g., student attrition), and surveys of parents and students conducted by the research team. Throughout the evaluation, Witte and his colleagues examined the characteristics of the students and families who participated in the program, the characteristics of the schools that elected to accept voucher students, the effects of the program on those schools, and the effects of the program on students' academic achievement. Because John Witte presents a summary of the evaluation in this issue of the *Kappan* (see page 59), we will mention here only a few relevant findings.

- In spite of formal and extensive efforts by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to inform families about the program, most families learned about the program from friends and relatives. Still, they reported high and increasing satisfaction with information provided by the DPI (76% satisfied or very satisfied).
- Voucher families cited educational quality as the most important factor in their decision to participate in the program (very important for 88%), followed by teaching approach and style (85%), disciplinary environment (76%), and general atmosphere of the school (74%).
- Compared to the families of low-income MPS students, voucher families were more likely to be headed by a single parent (75% of voucher families vs. 65% of low-income MPS families), to be poorer (average annual income of $11,630 vs. $12,100), and to be smaller (42% with more than two children vs. 65% with more than two children).
- Voucher parents were significantly more dissatisfied with their child's former (public) school and more satisfied with their child's current (voucher) school than were low-income public school parents.
- Compared with low-income MPS families, voucher families were slightly better educated (52% of mothers reporting some college vs. 30% of mothers in low-income MPS families), they had higher educational expectations (86% expected their child to attend college vs. 72%), and they were more involved at home and at school in their children's education.
- Voucher students entered the program with significantly lower academic achievement than their public school counterparts in both reading and mathematics.
- The voucher program seemed to promote an increase in the number of alternative educational opportunities available, with roughly 22% more "seats" available in private schools after the fourth year.
- Student achievement in the fourth year of the voucher program, after controlling for prior achievement and demographic variables (e.g., income, family size, etc.), was not significantly different for voucher students than for low-income MPS students (unadjusted percent at or above the 50th percentile, 28.8% to 25.7% in reading, 31.3% to 42.4% in mathematics).

Thus it appears that the voucher program in Milwaukee successfully met its goal of providing private school educational opportunities for the children of economically disadvantaged, inner-city families. Further, students attracted to the program were not, as many had feared, among the higher-achieving public school students but were instead among the lowest achieving. However, and interestingly, the families of the voucher children were better educated and more interested in their child's education, both before and after entering the program, than families of MPS students, though their involvement with the schools was lower before entering the program. Perhaps most important, the voucher program did not effect any consistent change in students' academic achievement. (Witte's article in this issue elaborates on this finding.)

The Witte evaluation remains the most thorough study of the Milwaukee voucher program to date and, as the first study of a publicly funded voucher program, was greeted with substantial attention. Voucher opponents hold up the study as evidence that such programs do not result in the desirable outcomes that advocates suggest, particularly improved student learning. Supporters of vouchers note that the program effectively serves poor families, does not draw high-achieving students from public schools, and improves parent involvement and satisfaction, even if it does not increase student learning (and that, they add, isn't yet clear).

The strengths of Witte's evaluation lie in the comparisons made — using interview and survey data — between voucher families and public school families. Findings drawn from these comparisons are consistent and reasonable. However, Witte's findings related to student achievement are open to question and much less clear. Student achievement data were based on scores from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, which were administered by the schools independent of the evaluation and thus were subject to inconsistencies in administration, test preparation, or bias.

Shortly after the original data from the evaluation were released, researchers at Harvard and Princeton independently reanalyzed the Milwaukee data. In his article in this issue, Witte addresses the criticisms raised by Greene, Peterson, and Du, so we will not discuss them further here. As did Greene and his colleagues, Rouse also found a statistically significant and positive program effect in terms of mathematics achievement; she did not find such an effect for reading achievement. Much more judiciously than Greene and his colleagues, Rouse notes several caveats to her analyses and cautions that "these are average effects that do not necessarily mean all of the choice schools are 'better' than the Milwaukee public schools." Perhaps as important as her findings related to student achievement, Rouse suggests that "the data collection from Milwaukee should be applauded as it allows us to learn more about the effectiveness of this program than from many other reforms. Nevertheless, . . . an evaluation design that treats the participants (and control or comparison group) as a survey sample with independent follow-up, though more costly, would avoid some of the data problems experienced here."[15]

Across the three studies, it seems clear that the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is effective in enhancing choice for low-income, predominantly African American and Hispanic families. Children of families who pursue the vouchers may be somewhat more "at risk" than the typical MPS student in that they are more likely to live in a single-parent home, are poorer, are achieving at lower levels, and have parents who are less involved in their education. Conversely, these children are somewhat less "at risk" in that their mothers are slightly better educated and they have fewer siblings. What is much less clear is whether participation in the voucher program leads to greater student achievement. Three independent investigations of this issue have produced inconsistent, sometimes conflicting, results.

The Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Grant Program

The most recent publicly funded voucher program was implemented in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1996. The program, the brainchild of Gov. George Voinovich, provides private school tuition scholarships (i.e., vouchers) to poor families within the Cleveland School District. In addition, the program offers tutoring grants to this same group of families, which can be used to obtain additional assistance for children who continue to attend Cleveland public schools. Vouchers and tutoring grants are awarded to families primarily on the basis of income but with an attempt to ensure that the relative ethnic enrollments of Cleveland public schools are maintained within the program. Consideration is given first to families whose incomes are at or below the federal poverty level and then to families with incomes of between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty index. Then, if any scholarships or tutoring grants remain, families with greater incomes will be eligible. Within each income range, scholarships are awarded through a random lottery process, structured to ensure that 75% of the scholarship recipients are African American.

In its first year (1996-97), the program enrolled 1,801 kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade children in 41 private schools. Of these, 635 were kindergarten students with no prior enrollment history, 526 were former private school students, and 640 were former Cleveland public school students. Three of the private schools were nonreligious, with all remaining voucher schools religiously affiliated (29 Catholic, three Islamic, six Protestant). Two of the three nonreligious schools were established by David Brennan, an active supporter of vouchers and a principal figure in moving the Cleveland voucher legislation through the legislature, specifically to serve voucher recipients. By 1997-98, vouchers were available to up to 4,000 children in kindergarten through grade 5, and the number of participating schools had increased to 44, including new schools sponsored by Brennan.

As in Milwaukee, the focus of the program was on providing educational choice and assistance to low-income, inner-city families, including the option of using state funds to defray the cost of private education. However, the Cleveland program differed from the voucher program in Milwaukee in three significant ways. First, the Cleveland program focused on children in kindergarten through third grade during the first year, with a grade to be added each of the next five years, rather than kindergarten through high school. Second, the Cleveland program provided state assistance to families that wished to continue to enroll their children in public school but wanted additional educational assistance from state-approved tutors. Thus the program not only supported private school choice but also provided additional options for public school families. It should be noted, however, that the tutoring grant program has been much less visible and much less successful than the scholarship program. Third, and perhaps most important, the Cleveland program allowed parents to choose private schools with religious affiliations from the outset.

The legislation that established the scholarship and tutoring grant program required the Ohio Department of Education to conduct an independent evaluation of the program during the first several years of its operation. Through a competitive bidding process, my colleagues and I at the Indiana Center for Evaluation at Indiana University were selected to complete this project. During each of the past two years, we released annual reports detailing the evaluation activities and results.[16] In addition to our state-sponsored evaluation, Greene and his colleagues have completed two studies of the Brennan-support-

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ed schools (named the HOPE schools) and have conducted a reanalysis of our first-year results.[17] These four reports provide the limited source of empirical information on the Cleveland voucher program.

Metcalf et al. Beginning in April 1997, our research team began a multi-year examination of several elements of the Cleveland voucher program. During the first two years, our primary focus was on evaluating the effects of the voucher program on students' academic achievement and establishing a data set and procedures that would allow longitudinal evaluation of the program's effects for at least three years. Because all students who had applied for a voucher had been offered one, the ideal comparison group (consisting of students whose families had applied for a voucher but who had not been selected in the random lottery) was not available. As a result, it was critical that the evaluation of the program take into account other relevant variables that might affect students' academic performance.

Previous literature had suggested that students who participated in choice programs were likely to be among the most successful public school students. Thus the evaluation team felt it particularly important to obtain a measure of students' academic performance prior to entry into the voucher program. No consistent measure of prior academic achievement was available for kindergarten students or for students who had attended a private school during the preceding year. However, test scores on the California Achievement Test, Form E, were available for all current third-grade students who had attended Cleveland public schools as second-graders during the previous year. Further, Cleveland public school records for these students (and for a comparison group of children who continued to attend Cleveland public schools) included equivalent indicators of family income, family structure, gender, and ethnicity.

The sample during the first two years thus included voucher students who had attended Cleveland public schools as second-graders but used vouchers to attend private schools for third or fourth grade and a comparison group of Cleveland public school third-graders. In the late spring of 1997 and 1998, the Terra Nova Survey (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1996) was administered by evaluation staff members to these students to obtain a current measure of academic achievement. Data on these students' prior achievement, gender, ethnicity, family income, and family structure were requested from the Cleveland public schools. Students for whom we could not locate records were eliminated from the study. Further, the two HOPE schools refused to allow their students to be tested during year one, and we were unable to include them in that year's evaluation.

> Vouchers did not promote increased achievement the first year but had begun to show some positive effects by the end of year two.

Across the two years, our evaluations yielded the following findings:

- Students who participated in the voucher program were very similar to their public school peers in terms of ethnicity (87% and 86% nonwhite respectively), family structure (67% and 65% lived only with their mothers), family income (86% and 88% eligible for the free-lunch program), and gender (53% and 52% female).
- Voucher students had been achieving at slightly, though significantly, higher levels than their public school peers prior to entering the voucher program, with mean second-grade achievement measures of 52.34 NCEs (normal-curve equivalents) for voucher students and 48.07 for public school students.
- Students who chose to leave the program after one year were achieving at significantly lower levels than their peers who chose to stay (mean difference of 8.3 NCEs across the five areas), though they had been achieving at roughly the same levels before entering the program.
- Teachers in public school classrooms had more years of experience (14 versus 8.5) and were more likely to have completed at least some graduate coursework than teachers in the private schools, but private school classes were slightly smaller (by about three students).
- After accounting for prior achievement, gender, ethnicity, family structure, and family income, there were no significant differences in third-grade achievement in NCEs between the voucher students and their public school peers at the end of year one, but a significant and positive effect was found in language (44.96 versus 39.82) and less clearly in science (39.66 versus 35.66) at the end of year two.
- Students attending the two newly established private schools were achieving at significantly lower levels by the end of year two than either their public school or private school voucher peers in all areas tested (mean difference 14.96 NCEs).

Our findings seemed to support those from Milwaukee in that the voucher program did not promote increased student achievement the first year but had begun to show some positive effects by the end of year two. Similarly, Cleveland voucher students were more likely to come from single-parent households, usually headed by a mother. However, our study found some differences related to the characteristics of the participating students. Voucher students in Milwaukee were of lower income and somewhat more likely to be members of minorities than their public school peers, but students in Cleveland were of very similar income and ethnicity to students in the public schools. Further, whereas voucher students in Milwaukee were among the lowest-achieving students prior to their entry into the program, voucher students in Cleveland were achieving at slightly higher levels than their public school peers before they entered their voucher schools.

The early results from the Cleveland program were noted as preliminary, based on only the first two years of a multi-year evaluation and subject to the limitations of the evaluation. While the project addressed the concerns of Rouse and others related to control of the achievement testing process, it did not control for at least two important variables. First, no measure of parental education level was obtained, a factor related to students' academic achievement. Second, the study did not make use of a randomly assigned comparison group of students, thus leaving open the possibility that the voucher and nonvoucher students were different in important ways. My colleagues and I noted these limitations in our reports and developed methods for addressing them in future years. Nonetheless, release of the first-year and second-year reports provoked a flurry of attention from both advocates and opponents of vouchers and, like the evaluation efforts in Milwaukee, prompted reanalysis by Greene and his colleagues.

Greene, Howell, and Peterson. Greene, Howell, and Peterson conducted two additional evaluations of the Cleveland voucher program during its first two years. In their first study, they collected data to answer two questions: 1) What are the effects of participation in the voucher program on parents' satisfaction with their children's schools? 2) What are the effects of the voucher program on students' academic achievement? The first question was addressed through a telephone survey of 1,014 parents whose children had received vouchers and were attending private schools and 1,006 parents who had applied for vouchers but did not accept them and whose children were instead attending Cleveland public schools. The second question was addressed by examining fall-to-spring changes in the academic achievement of 263 voucher students attending the two private HOPE schools.

Parental interviews were conducted during the summer of 1997, after completion of the first year of the Cleveland voucher program. Response rates (number of parents agreeing to be interviewed) were 74.1% for recipients and 48.6% for nonrecipients (those who were offered vouchers but declined them, and those who were eligible for vouchers but unaware that they had received them). Thus Greene and his colleagues note that the findings are more representative of recipients than of nonrecipients. In reporting their findings, Greene and his colleagues include only those for recipients but indicate instances in which recipients and nonrecipients differed significantly. Their findings include:

- Recipients indicated that the primary reason for their interest in the voucher program was improved academic quality (85%), followed by safety (79%), school location (percentage not reported), and religion (37%).
- Of parents who did not accept their child's tuition voucher, 44% indicated that they were unaware they had been offered a voucher; of those who actively *declined* the offer, reasons for their decision were transportation problems (36.5%),[18] failure to gain admission to the school of their choice (35.5%), and financial considerations (31.2%).
- Recipient parents were much more satisfied with virtually every aspect of their children's schools than were nonrecipients, including academic quality (66% and 30%), safety (60% and 25%), discipline (55% and 23%), attention to the child (not reported), class size (not reported), facility (not reported), and teaching moral values (71% and 25%).
- Minority recipients were slightly less satisfied with their private school than were nonminority recipients (3% difference indicated, but not reported), whereas there were no differences between minority and nonminority nonrecipients.
- Higher-income nonrecipients (incomes above $50,000) were "about 6%" more satisfied with their child's public school than low-income nonrecipients (incomes below $10,000).

In the second portion of this study, Greene and his colleagues examine fall-to-spring changes in achievement test scores of children attending the two HOPE schools. These schools were newly established specifically to accommodate voucher children for whom sufficient space might not be available in other private schools, and they are of particular interest. These schools announced from the outset that they would accept all students who applied for admission, including "many of the poorest and most educationally disadvantaged students," a fact that is borne out by examination of second-grade test scores. Further, the two schools enroll nearly 15% of all voucher students and approximately 25% of former public school voucher students.

From their inception, the HOPE schools integrated a program of self-evaluation that was to include administration of the California Achievement Test, Form E (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1985) in the fall and spring of each year. Classroom teachers proctored each administration of the complete battery over a weeklong period. Generally, the investigators found that the students improved significantly from fall to spring testing, with aggregate results[19] for 155 students including:

- a significant increase of 5.6 points in reading (28.4 to 34.0);
- a nonsignificant decrease of 4.5 points in language (41.2 to 36.7), resulting from a 19-point decline for first-grade students;
- a significant increase of 11.6 points in mathematics total (29.2 to 40.8); and
- a significant increase of 12.8 points in mathematical concepts (28.6 to 41.4).

Upon collection of fall 1997 data, the investigators found the gains made by students during the previous year continued, though they diminished somewhat. For the 95 students who completed both fall 1996 and fall 1997 tests, Greene and his colleagues report:

- a significant increase of 5.7 points in reading (31.3 to 37.0);
- a nonsignificant decline of 0.3 points in language (38.1 to 37.8);
- a significant increase of 8.6 points in mathematics total (31.0 to 39.6); and
- a significant increase of 7.1 points in mathematics concepts (30.2 to 37.3).

Greene and his colleagues note that "definitive conclusions about the effects

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of the scholarship program on academic achievement depend upon the collection of additional data." However, they suggest that the generally positive and statistically significant gains made by these students are particularly impressive when contrasted with "the 1- to 2-point decline that is typical of inner-city students."[20] Across the data on parental attitude and student achievement, the investigators find substantial evidence in favor of the voucher program and little evidence to support those who argue against it. They further conclude that the results indicate the need for choice programs to be structured to provide special funding arrangements when necessary and to ensure that students with special needs are not overlooked.

The second study, conducted by Peterson, Greene, and Howell, was a reanalysis of third-grade achievement data collected and then made public by our group. Peterson and his colleagues were critical of several aspects of the initial study, noting particularly our decision not to include in the analyses the unique test data for students in the two HOPE schools and suggesting that the second-grade test scores used as covariates in the original study were "dubious." Thus Peterson and his colleagues recalculated students' scores to a common metric, producing a larger sample, and then reanalyzed our original achievement data. They found:

- After covarying on gender, ethnicity, family income, and family structure, but without including the measure of prior achievement, voucher students' third-grade achievement is significantly higher than that of their public school peers in language and science ($p<.01$), but not significantly different in reading, mathematics, or social studies. The investigators note that the differences in reading and social studies, which favor voucher students, are significant when a one-tailed test with $p<.10$ is applied.[21]
- When prior achievement is included in the covariates, the differences in language and science, both favoring voucher students, are significant at $p<.10$ in a one-tailed test.[22]

Summarizing their report, Peterson and his colleagues indicate differences in methodology between their study and ours but note:

> Both studies find positive choice school effects in some subject domains among third-grade students. Our results also find gains for students in other grades as well . . . . It is also worth noting that even the most conservative estimates of choice-school effects observed in Cleveland are comparable to those observed in Milwaukee after one year. . . . It will be of interest to learn whether the effects in Cleveland will accumulate over time, as happened in Milwaukee.[23]

The results of evaluations of the Cleveland voucher program are tentative and early; much more time and data are needed before conclusions can be drawn with confidence. Perhaps because the program is so new and data drawn from it limited, the findings of studies conducted to date appear to provide somewhat conflicting results. In general, parents whose children participate in the voucher program seem to be pleased with the opportunity they are provided and feel satisfied with the private schools their children attend. They based their decision to pursue tuition vouchers primarily on their interest in improving the quality of their children's education and their concern over the safety of their children's public schools. The effects of the voucher program on children's academic achievement are unclear.

Summary

Surprisingly little research has been conducted on publicly funded voucher programs. And, in many ways, the findings have been subjected to interpretations based to a much greater extent on ideology than on scholarly detachment. Unfortunately, there remains considerable misunderstanding of the results of research on vouchers, and confusion is exacerbated by highly public commentary from those on both sides of the issue. Nonetheless, examination of research related to school choice and particularly of publicly funded vouchers reveals some consistent, though undoubtedly tentative, patterns.

1. *Parents whose children attend a private school using a voucher are pleased with the opportunity.* Participating parents were dissatisfied with their children's former public schools and chose to enroll their children in private schools for improved educational quality and greater safety. Interestingly, and in contrast to some other studies of private school parents,[24] religion or religious education was not a primary consideration.

2. *Voucher programs can be structured to provide additional educational choice to families of children who may be at considerable risk of school failure.* In both Milwaukee and Cleveland, it is obvious that the voucher programs have successfully targeted the families for whom they were developed. Participating families are of lower income than typical public school families, they come primarily from ethnic minority groups, and they are usually headed by a single mother. It is important to note, however, that when compared only with public school families at or below the federal poverty level, voucher families are smaller, the mothers' level of education is higher, and the parents' commitment to education is slightly higher.

3. *Current programs suggest that only a very small portion of eligible families apply for available tuition vouchers.* Voucher opponents cite this as evidence that dissatisfaction with public schools is not widespread,[25] and they are probably at least partially correct. In Milwaukee, fewer than 7% of eligible families apply for the voucher program, and in Cleveland the percentage is slightly smaller and has decreased in the three years of the program. Neither voucher program has produced the mass exodus from public schools that was forecast. However, whether this reflects fundamental satisfaction with public schools, indifference, apathy, or lack of information cannot be determined until additional data are available.

4. *The available evidence does not indicate clearly that voucher programs do or do not improve students' academic achievement.* Supporters of choice, and particularly of voucher programs, frequently base their arguments on the academic benefits of choice for students. However, the very limited evidence to date does not indicate that students who participate in the choice schools will do better than they would have if they had remained in public schools. When prior achievement and relevant demographic variables are controlled, the achievement of voucher students is not consistently different from that of public school students. It is reasonable to wonder whether additional years will yield similar results. Both voucher programs are relatively new, with schools, teachers, families, and students learning how best to work within the new arrangements. Over time, the effectiveness of the programs may be improved. Nonetheless, current data provide no firm ba-

sis for a claim that providing families with educational choice will necessarily improve student learning.

Final Thoughts

What does all of this mean? Will the momentum for additional educational choice diminish? Will choice programs, particularly voucher programs, damage the current system of public education in the U.S.? Are publicly funded voucher programs "good"? What are the implications of all of this for educators? We do not yet have sufficient evidence to answer these questions, even for existing voucher programs, and a multitude of factors will affect the direction, extent, and nature of school choice in coming years. Still, some "predictions" are possible.

It seems unlikely that the tremendous momentum for educational choice will diminish; rather, it will probably increase. Families will continue to press for a wider variety of choices for their children's education, and policy makers, both conservative and liberal, will respond. Already more educational choices are available to families than at any other time in U.S. history, across both the public and private sectors. Magnet schools, charter schools, home schooling, inter- and intradistrict choice programs, and in-school programmatic choices are the rule rather than the exception. In an age of egalitarianism, the alternatives that have always been available to middle- and upper-income families will be rightfully demanded by families with fewer resources. Even skeptics admit that, for better or for worse, school choice is with us to stay.[26]

At least one implication of the choice movement for public schools is reflected in the paragraph above. Public schools must continue to develop programs to attract and retain families that now expect at least some range of choices. As forced busing for desegregation continues to decline while nonpublic alternatives become more prevalent, metropolitan school districts are presented with both a challenge and an opportunity. Students who previously moved from these districts to suburban schools now provide a larger potential market for public school education. Further, whereas previous attempts at desegregation relied on imposed school assignment, most efforts (e.g., the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program) now focus on developing programs that attempt to improve racial balance by attracting targeted minority or nonminority students to schools. It seems, then, that at least one impact of the choice movement has been and will continue to be an increase in the number and variety of options that public schools will provide.

> To date, no choice programs have the potential to destroy the enormous enterprise that is public education in this country.

Will choice programs decrease public support, either sentimental or financial, for public schools? This question is more difficult to answer. Undoubtedly, if a substantial number of families are provided with and take advantage of alternatives to public education, the effect on public schooling as it has been conducted will be negative. If public schools serve a smaller proportion of school-age children, they will subsequently have a smaller, perhaps less vocal, base of public support. Concurrently, resources for public schools will diminish as funds are redirected. It could be argued that, if public schools fail to provide a service that is desired by enough people (i.e., customers) to remain viable, they should be forced to redesign themselves or close. Of course, while this situation is possible, perhaps even desirable to some, it is unlikely to occur. Though U.S. public schools must deal with greater competition than ever before, there is no evidence to suggest that nonpublic competition will ever be allowed to reach the point at which the public school system itself is endangered. Public education in the U.S. is a huge business. It employs millions of people, many of whom belong to a well-organized professional union with substantial political clout; it generates significant income for businesses that supply services and products to the schools; and it touches literally every citizen. To date, no choice programs, public or private, existing or proposed, have the potential to destroy the enormous enterprise that is public education in this country.

Is the educational choice movement good or bad? It seems untenable to argue that giving parents and families greater control over their children's education is bad. Fundamentally, greater family control, within certain limits, should be encouraged. Thus the question is probably not whether educational choice is good or bad, but rather the nature of the boundaries within which choice should be allowed. Many in the education establishment would argue that the framework should be relatively restrictive to minimize differences in the outcomes and benefits students derive. However, we take a different position and suggest that the widest possible range of choices should be made available and that, though it will not always be popular, the educational market should be allowed to operate. Doing so will not just benefit families and children but also stands to afford professional educators the opportunity to expand the ways in which we conduct our classrooms. Further, arguing to restrict parental choice in education means accepting some dangerous assumptions.

The position to restrict educational choices requires one to assume either that some families will make better choices than others or that someone besides parents — presumably federal or state education authorities or education scholars — knows what education is best for all children. The first point is obvious and can be conceded at the outset. Certainly, given the opportunity, some families will make much better choices than others and, as a result, some children will get a "better" education. However, taken to its extreme, this would suggest that families should be given no choice at all about their children's education and that teachers or local school authorities should have no latitude in the curriculum or instructional approaches that their students experience. Of course, even under these circumstances, differences in the ability of the classroom teacher would cause some students to get a better education than others, unless we are much more successful in producing and more willing to accept "teacher-proof" curricula than we have been in the past. And so, greater educational choice will mean that some children get a better education than others. But they already do, and eliminating choice completely would not change this. However, allowing families choice would give them a chance to move their children out of schools that *they* believe are not good for them.

Now we arrive at the second and related assumption that supports restricting choice — that someone other than parents is in a position to determine what is or is not good education. If, in fact, this were true, there should be widespread agreement, at least among those sufficiently learned to know, about what schools should teach, how they should teach it, and what evidence they should provide about their effectiveness in doing so.

Education literature and the popular media provide daily evidence to the contrary. States rebel at the suggestion of a national curriculum or mandatory nationwide student assessment; local schools fight against state-mandated curricula or testing; and even within schools, individual teachers openly or passively subvert the district's curriculum. Even scholars of education cannot agree about what is "good" education or "desirable" educational practice. While there may well be one best education or curriculum or instructional approach (ours, of course), we don't seem to have identified it yet, and whether we ever will is arguable at best. But, until or unless a consensus is reached among all the stakeholders in children's education, it is unfair and patronizing to suggest that parents and families are generally less entitled or less equipped than others to make these determinations for themselves and for their children.

Educational choice will continue to be the most contentious issue in U.S. education for the foreseeable future. More and more families will be afforded more and more alternatives for their children's education. As educators, both pre-K–12 and university based, we have a unique opportunity to use the educational choice movement to promote innovative, creative approaches to schools and teaching. In order to draw students and maintain enrollments, schools will be seeking assistance in developing and improving programs to make them more attractive to greater numbers of families. If we take advantage of this opportunity, we have the potential to make schools more inviting and supportive places for children. If we ignore the momentum for educational choice, we risk becoming increasingly irrelevant to our stakeholders.

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3. John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1990); and Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

4. Herbert Gintis, "The Political Economy of School Choice," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 96, 1995, pp. 492-511; and Nathan Glazer, "American Public Education: The Relevance of Choice," *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 1993, pp. 647-50.

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6. Lisa Carlos, *The Privatization of Choice* (San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Policy Update No. 3, 1993).

7. L. Joseph Matthews and J. Merrell Hansen, "Choice Within Schools Can Help Students, Schools, and Society," *NASSP Bulletin*, September 1995, pp. 69-76.

8. Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 30th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1998, pp. 45-46.

9. Wayne Jones and Frank Ambrosie, "What Are the Challenges Inherent in Schools of Choice?," *NASSP Bulletin*, September 1995, pp. 21-32.

10. Allison Tucker and William Lauber, *School Choice Programs: What's Happening in the States* (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1995).

11. Kim K. Metcalf, "Advocacy Under the Guise of Science," *Education Week*, 23 September 1998, pp. 34, 39.

12. John F. Witte and Christopher A. Thorn with Kim M. Pritchard and Michele Claibourn, *Fourth Year Report: The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program* (Madison: Robert M. La Follette Institute of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin, 1994); and John F. Witte, Troy D. Sterr, and Christopher A. Thorn, *Fifth Year Report: Milwaukee Parental Choice Program* (Madison: Robert M. La Follette Institute of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin, 1995).

13. Jay Greene, Paul Peterson, and Jingtao Du, "The Effectiveness of School Choice in Milwaukee: A Secondary Analysis of Data from the Program's Evaluation," paper presented before the Panel on the Political Analysis of Urban School Systems at the August/September meetings of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 1996; and Cecilia Rouse, "Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement: An Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 113, 1998, pp. 553-602.

14. Two related facts are noteworthy. First, the comparison sample of nonvoucher public school students is open to question because of selection bias. Although Witte and his colleagues attempted to control for many relevant, nonprogram variables (e.g., prior achievement, gender, income, etc.), it must be assumed that participating students and families were substantially different from nonparticipating families at least in their motivation, interest, willingness, or ability to pursue the voucher. Second, because comparisons of students' academic achievement were based on the results of tests administered by the schools, no control of the conditions of testing was available to Witte and his colleagues.

15. Rouse, op. cit.

16. Kim K. Metcalf, William Boone, Frances Stage, Todd Chilton, Patty Muller, and Polly A. Tait, *An Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Grant Program: First-Year Report* (Bloomington: Indiana Center for Evaluation, Indiana University, 1997); and Kim K. Metcalf, Patty Muller, William Boone, Polly Tait, Frances Stage, and Nicole Stacey, *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program: Second-Year Report* (Bloomington: Indiana Center for Evaluation, Indiana University, 1998).

17. Jay Greene, William Howell, and Paul Peterson, *Lessons from the Cleveland Scholarship Program* (Cambridge, Mass.: Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, 1997); and Paul Peterson, Jay Greene, and William Howell, *New Findings for the Cleveland Scholarship Program: A Reanalysis of Data from the Indiana University School of Education Evaluation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, 1998).

18. Serious transportation problems plagued the program during the first year, causing some students to miss much of the beginning of the school year. Ultimately, taxi transportation and other forms of public transportation were utilized. However, during the autumn semester of the second year, the transportation policy was changed from providing transportation for students living one or more miles from their school to providing transportation only to students living three or more miles from their school.

19. Greene and his colleagues discuss their results in terms of "percentile points," but the data seem to be in normal-curve equivalents.

20. Greene, Howell, and Peterson, p. 10.

21. Raw data are not presented by the investigators; however, adjusted mean differences between voucher and public school students are as follows: language 4.13, science 4.47, reading 2.45, mathematics 0.55, and social studies 2.50.

22. Again, raw data are not presented, but adjusted mean differences between voucher and public school students are as follows: language 2.37, science 2.70, reading 0.38, mathematics -0.92, and social studies 0.63.

23. Peterson, Greene, and Howell, p. 5.

24. See, for example, Ernest Boyer, *A Special Report on School Choice* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992).

25. See, for example, Alex Molnar, "The Real Lesson of Milwaukee's Voucher Experiment: It's Political, Not Educational," *Education Week*, 6 August 1997, pp. 76, 55.

26. Jones and Ambrosie, op. cit.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

OUR GOAL in preparing this volume was to provide an overview of the topic of school choice. We wanted neither to advocate for nor to oppose the idea of giving parents and families a greater voice in their children's education. In fact, even opponents of school choice seldom argue against allowing parents some choice. The fundamental issue, then, is not whether to allow parental choice in children's education, but rather how much choice to allow — in other words, within what parameters.

Those who are most conservative in their view of school choice argue that the parameters should be comparatively restrictive. This position often presumes the value of public education as it has traditionally been conceptualized and conducted in the United States. A primary component of the argument is that public schools are intended to equalize opportunity for all students, particularly disadvantaged children. To this end, educational choices must be limited to ensure that public education is of comparably similar quality and type for all students. In this view, schools are to serve the public welfare, and society (or government as representing society's interests) is in the best position to determine what is "good" education. When the parameters of choice are too broad, it is feared, the range of opportunity and success between and among children will increase. Choice would then result in racial and economic segregation, religious indoctrination, social intolerance, less educational accountability, and reduced educational quality. Instead of expanding the *number* of options available to families, devoting resources to improving the *quality* of options already available to families within the public school sector will be a more useful approach, by this view.

In contrast, the most liberal view of school choice presumes that education will be improved for all children when they and their parents are allowed the greatest range of choices. Families will make choices that allow their children to achieve optimal success, with some achieving more and some achieving less success than others. From this perspective, the public welfare is best served by allowing individuals to reach their unique levels of optimal success, and greater choice rather than less is most likely to promote this. Families are in the best position to know what is "good" education for their children. Choice would promote innovation and competition among schools, give educators greater autonomy, increase parent involvement in and satisfaction with their children's schools, and improve educational quality. In this view, reallocating current educational resources to support radically different educational approaches, while it will expand differences between and among students, will ultimately serve the societal good.

Of course, in practice the issue is not so clear and the positions are not so distinct. Nonetheless, it could be argued that the fundamental issue that makes discussion of school choice so difficult is the philosophical conflict between individual and societal rights. Underlying arguments about whether greater or lesser parental choice will improve educational quality is the notion of who is in the best position to determine what is a "good" education and for whom is it provided. If public education is provided with the primary purpose of serving or promoting the general societal good, then it is society that is in the best position to determine what is "good" education for all members of the society. Further, because it is society's responsibility to support the general rather than the individual good, it is more important to minimize individual differences in opportunity or achievement. On the other hand, if public education is provided with the primary purpose of serving or promoting the good of the individual who receives it, then it is that individual or, in the case of minors, the individual's parents who is both responsible for and in the best position to determine what is "good" education. Allowing each individual to achieve to his or her unique potential, even when this creates substantial differences between members of society, is most important.

The conflict of ideas and emotions that underlie school choice is not easily resolved, nor is the issue itself. The extent to which families and parents should be given greater opportunity for choosing the education their children receive will continue to be debated. Even as the amount of credible research increases, the nature of the issue will always be cause for disagreement. However, two things appear certain. First, a wide range of choices is already available to most families within and beyond the public sector. While some of these choices represent direct challenges to the tradition of public education in this country, and thus they are controversial, most offer choices from among traditional alternatives within the existing public school context. Second, although the parameters that restrict it will be debated, school choice will continue to be an issue in U.S. education for the foreseeable future.

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